

FOUR GIRLS



BY
MARY RODNEY

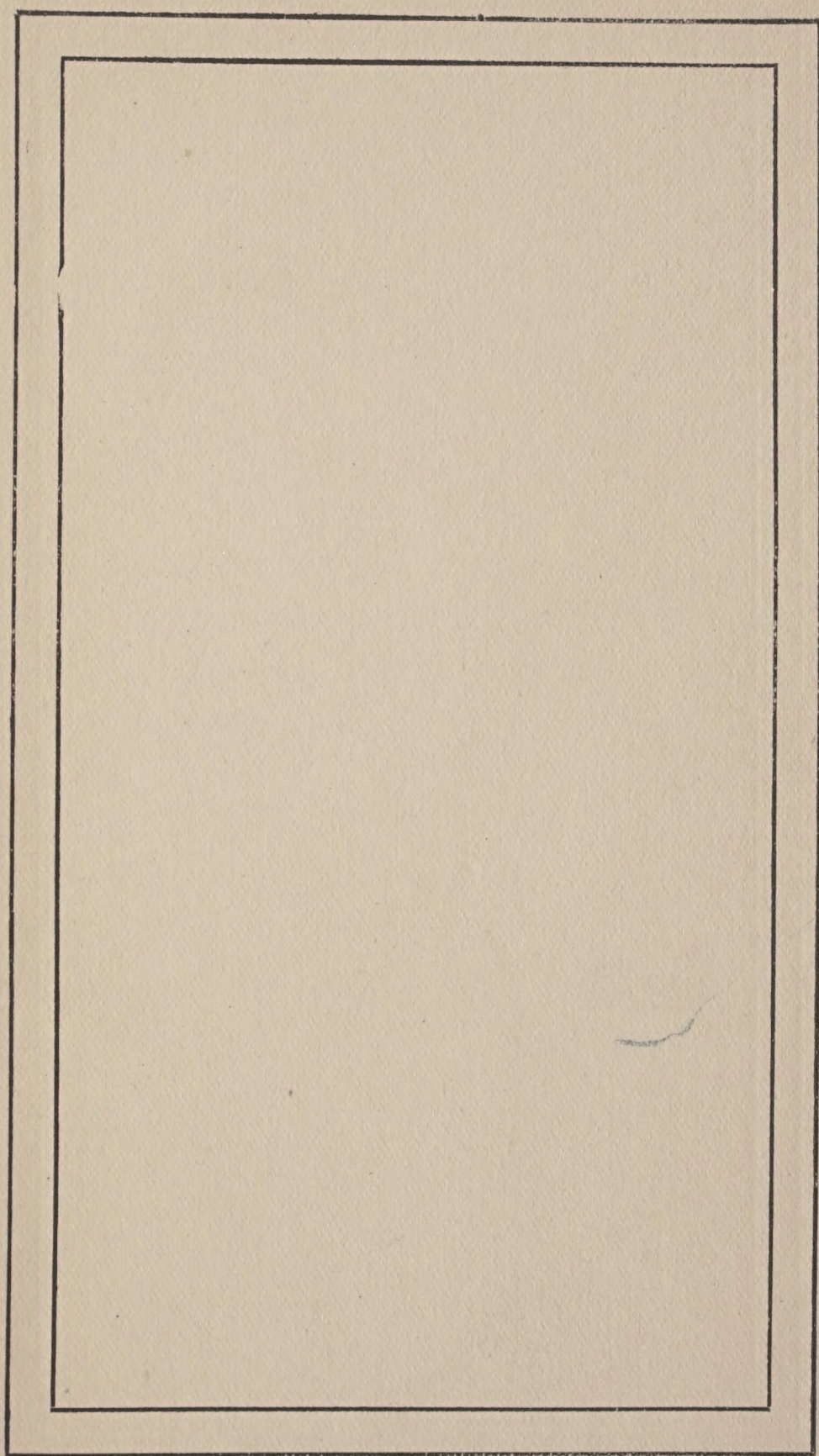


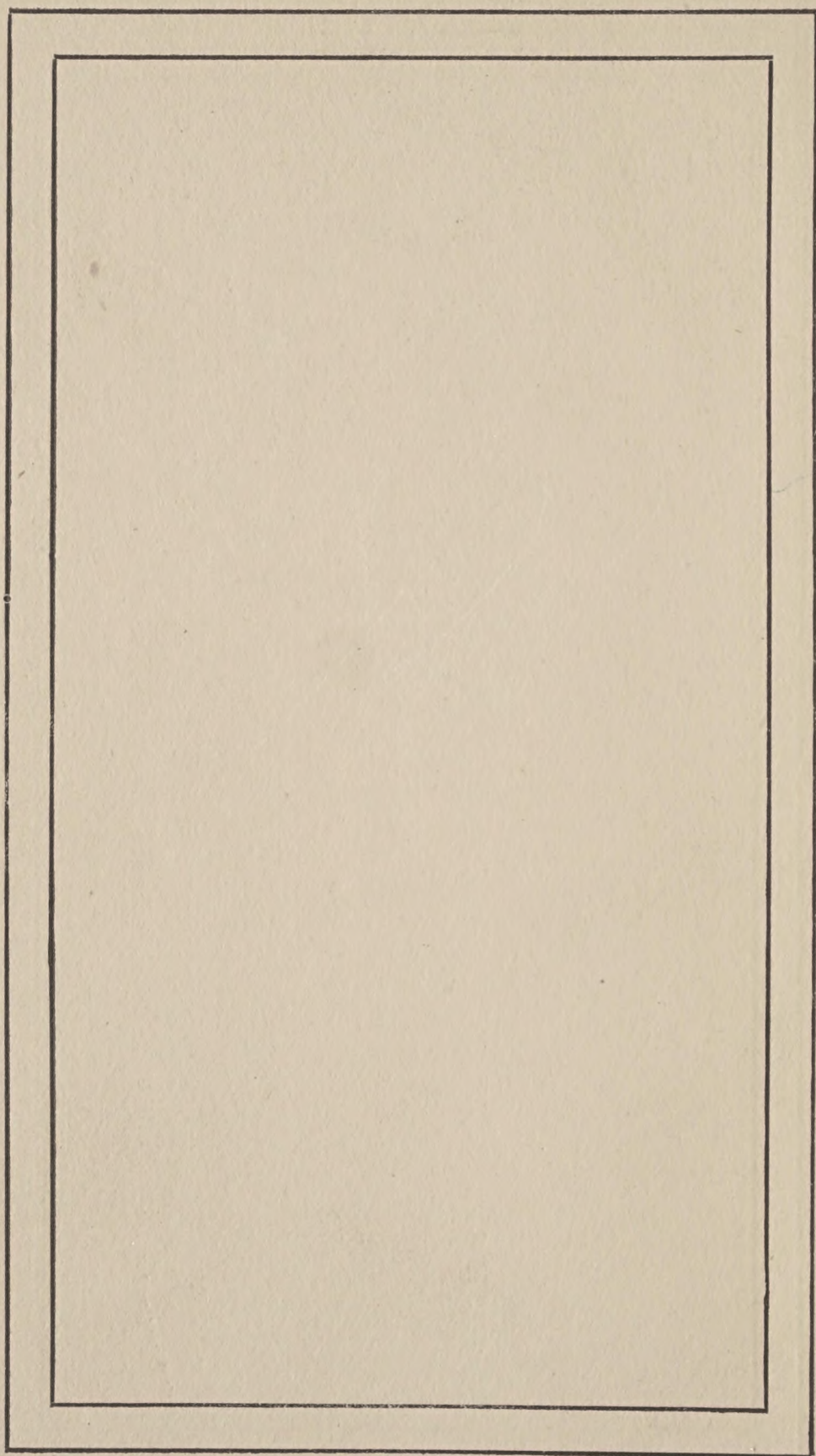
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FOUR GIRLS



“ Will you two ladies accept my escort ? ”

FOUR GIRLS

THE STORY OF REALIZED
===== AMBITION =====

BY
MARY RODNEY



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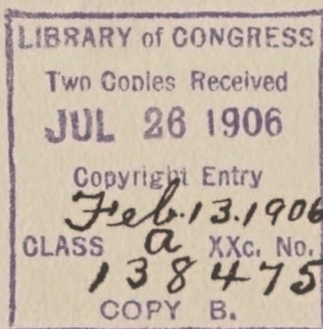
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FOUR GIRLS

CHAPTER I

THE COMMENCEMENT

Two girls sat beneath the shade of a large, spreading oak, on their last day of school life.

Grand old oaks were plentiful in those beautiful grounds. The college was situated in one of the oldest towns in Mississippi, and those majestic ornaments of nature had been growing for centuries, spreading their branches in every direction, affording shade to all who wished to avail themselves.

Ethel Easton was tall and slender, with soft hazel eyes and wavy brown hair which, when the sun shone on it, made a glimmer of amber light, the threads looking as though the brown in it was self-luminous. Her complexion was

clear, soft, and pearly white, and when the faint color mantled her cheeks, she was wondrously beautiful.

Marion Roseland was short, but her well-rounded figure showed to an advantage in the tight-fitting gowns she always wore. Her complexion was one of olive hue, her hair of raven blackness; but her chief charm lay in the fathomless dark eyes which could change with every emotion of their owner; they were fascinating and bewitching.

“Ethel, can you realize that this is the last day in our old school? Sometimes I feel glad that all of our hard study is at an end; then a feeling of sadness comes over me, for we are both young and do not know what the future has in store for us. Our lives can readily be compared to ships, loosed from moorings and launched on the bosom of the mighty deep; they may have a safe voyage and all be well, or they may be tossed and driven by the storm,

wind, and tide, until, at their journey's end, they will only be shattered wrecks."

Ethel, looking up, was surprised to find Marion's dark eyes filled with tears. "Come, dear, cheer up, you must not be so melancholy. Let us hope that the future holds nothing but sunshine, and that we may be spared a long life of happiness; come, let us go to the house."

They linked arms and walked toward the grand old structure which had been their home for the last five years, and which they were to leave this evening with honors.

Dresdale was asked to address the graduates.

"Young ladies," he began, "this being your commencement day, it is, in one sense of the word, the commencement of your lives; for it is the most important event, except one." Here he paused, which gave the audience time to realize that he was referring to marriage, and they smiled while the young ladies blushed, as

he continued: "And I would like to give you some advice; but you would not heed it, as each has his own way to make in the world, and the advice of others is set at naught.

"I will only say, youth is ambitious for money, fame, and honor, yet you may achieve all these things and fail. Some of the greatest failures have been really the greatest successes. And now my parting advice to the young ladies is, always be true to yourselves, and you will find your path through life bereft of many a thorn."

After the commencement exercises were over, friends and relatives gathered around the graduates to congratulate them. Marion and Ethel were standing apart from the gay throng talking, when Bertrand Roseland, Marion's brother, joined them.

"And this is Ethel, my little playmate, grown almost beyond recollection," he said, as he advanced holding out his hand.



“ And this is Ethel.”

“I do not think I would have recognized you, Mr. Roseland,” she answered, “for it has been seven years since we last met.”

“I suppose I shall have to say ‘Miss Easton,’ now, as you are no more a school girl, but a full-fledged young lady.”

“I am always Ethel to my friends,” she said, as she raised her large hazel eyes to his face. In that glance, she took in the deep blue eyes, with long sweeping lashes, a crown of light brown hair which curled in small ringlets on his high, intellectual brow; the delicate mustache which almost hid the firm but well-shaped mouth, the aquiline nose and fair complexion; withal, a very handsome man, one that any girl might be proud to win. That thought caused a slight blush to suffuse her face; for a chord had been touched in her nature which seemed to reverberate as if touched by the magic wand of love, and which never again would be silenced at her command.

Bertrand caught a glimpse of the tell-tale blush and sparkling eye, as he remarked:

“Your thoughts must have been very pleasant just then, Miss Ethel; may I not share them?”

“There are some thoughts that are better left unspoken,” she answered.

“I might have known that I would be rebuked for my audacity, so ask your forgiveness. Let me congratulate you and Marion on the success of your essays; they showed exceptional talent.”

“We tried our best; but the exertion has proved too much for Marion. See how tired she looks,” and they both glanced at the slight figure who had left them and was making her way to her mother.

“I hope your surmises are incorrect, and that she will be herself after she rests; but how very thoughtless of me to keep you standing all this time. Come, let us retire to the cozy

corner, where we can have a chat, all to ourselves."

They talked until the party broke up and each went to his respective resting-place. Long after the lights were out and everyone seemed wrapped in slumber, Ethel Easton sat beside her window, looking out on the starlit firmament above and the rose-bedecked garden below, from which the most delicate perfume was wafted, impregnating the entire atmosphere which surrounded her; but she paid no heed to nature's grandeur, for her thoughts were of the man whose acquaintance she had renewed that night. Why did he haunt her vision? Why drive sleep from her eyelids? Surely if this was love, there was more bitter than sweet in the contemplation. Could she hide her secret, or would her actions betray her? No, she would be of Spartan courage and so conduct herself as to let others think her light-hearted and gay, even frivolous, if need be.

It was thus her thoughts ran on, until Marion, moving uneasily in her sleep, aroused her, and going to the bedside, Ethel looked down on the sleeper. Thinking she saw something unnatural in Marion's face, she at once awoke her.

“Why, Ethel, have you not gone to bed?” was Marion's response. “Come, undress yourself at once.” Ethel, obeying her, retired, and soon both girls were in dreamland.

CHAPTER II

MARION'S ILLNESS

THE following morning everything was in confusion at the college building; the graduates were separating, each going to her respective home to fill her vocation in life. Parting is a dismal thing! Many of the scholars had wound themselves in the affections of their teachers, and the breaking of that bond of friendship caused many a tear and heartfelt sorrow.

Marion and Ethel, as they were leaving the old familiar scenes, dropped many a tear; but youth is ever hopeful, for it has the future, which, to look forward to, has a brilliant aspect. So the girls, forgetting their sorrow, were soon chatting merrily. When they reached the station Ethel noticed that Marion was very pale, and that she visibly shook, so

terribly was her nervous system affected. Taking her hand, Ethel said:

“Marion, you are completely worn out; you have worked so hard that I know your brain is all confusion; a rest will bring you out all right.”

“It may, but I am dubious, for I really feel ill.”

“Well, lean your head on my shoulder and try to sleep, it may do you good,” Ethel answered.

“You dear, unselfish girl; you, too, must be worn out; so I will not tax your strength, but will lean on Mamma.”

Her head dropped wearily on her mother's shoulder, and she soon fell into a troubled slumber. She was uneasy, and Mrs. Roseland, looking at her, saw the hot flush mantling her cheek and felt her feverish brow; then she knew that her daughter was going to pay a heavy penalty for her distinction.

Fortunately, their railroad journey was not very long, as they lived in the adjoining State of Louisiana, in one of the Southern parishes. When they reached home, a physician was immediately called, who, when he had examined the patient, pronounced her malady brain fever.

How her mother wished she had persuaded Bertrand to stay; but he had parted from them at the depot to go back to his duties. He had chosen a physician's life as a calling, and he could now have been of great assistance.

For days and weeks Marion's life hung on a single thread. How patiently the mother watched and cooled the fevered brow of the sufferer when she raved and tossed in her delirium! Sometimes Marion supposed herself on a ship, tossed about on the billowy waves, and then her mother's hand was the rudder to prevent it from dashing against the huge rocks which constantly arose to gigantic heights. At

such times Marion would grasp the hand so tightly as to cause pain. Then, suddenly, the sea would be calmed. Marion would then be so still that the frightened mother and nurse would try to arouse her.

“Listen!” she would say, “don’t you hear the moaning of the wind through the trees? Hush, it will reach us soon, then the ship will glide on.”

It was a blessed relief to the watchers when that wind did “reach the ship.”

Ethel was a constant visitor, and breathed many a prayer for her recovery.

Mr. Roseland had sent for Bertrand, who came immediately. He was completely shocked at the change in his sister; for these two loved each other with a fondness which no earthly hand could sever.

Tenderly he watched by her bedside for weeks, then, finding that she would live, he was obliged to return his duties before she had

recognized him. All during the winter it was a struggle between life and death; but Marion's strong constitution came to her rescue and the former gained the ascendancy.

Little by little she began to recover, and when the pleasant days of spring came she was able to sit in a chair by the window and feel the warm sunshine as it thrilled her every nerve, putting new life and vigor into her wasted frame. She also watched the pinioned songsters as they joyously flitted from bough to bough, singing their glad tidings of the re-opening of another beautiful spring. The trees, too, were again dressing themselves in their bright mantles of green, refreshing to behold!

Marion raised her eyes from all this gorgeousness of nature, and let them rest on the faithful mother as she glided about the room, putting it in order.

“Mamma, dear, your sweet face is worn and

thin; my sickness has been a great tax on your strength; for I know whose hand it was that cooled my brow. I could always tell when you were near me, and I missed you when you left. I do not see how you stood it!"

"It was prayer that sustained me, daughter; through the long, dreary days and nights it was on my lips. But I never lived through your sickness, Marion, I only existed, and I pray God that we may never be called on to go through such an ordeal again."

"Poor Papa! I noticed this morning that he, too, had suffered; how glad he was when I recognized him; he looks as if a dreadful load had been lifted from his mind."

"Yes, it was hard for him, Marion, to leave you day after day to go to his business, never knowing what time he might be summoned to give you up; it was a terrible ordeal."

"Mamma, there was someone else by my side while I was sick; I sometimes imagined it

was Bertrand, for his presence seemed to have a soothing effect; tell me, was it he? ”

Her mother smiled, as she answered: “ Yes, Marion, it was he, and he stayed until you were out of danger; then he was obliged to return.”

“ Oh, if I could only have recognized him, for I should have loved to have seen him so much. Did Ethel meet him? ”

“ Yes, they went walking twice together, but Bertrand could hardly be persuaded to leave you.”

While they were conversing there came a knock at the door. Mrs. Roseland answered it, and there stood Ethel.

“ How is the sick girl to-day? ” she said, as she came forward and kissed her.

“ I am feeling stronger each day. I will soon be able to go out; and I know the fresh air will do me a world of good.”

“ It is a lovely morning, Mrs. Roseland; do

you think it would hurt her to take a little walk?"

"No, it might strengthen her." So saying, her mother brought her wraps, and the two girls started off. They sat down on a rustic seat under the shade of a large magnolia tree. Marion seemed to drink in the pure fresh air as it came down through the perfumed branches, and every draught seemed to give her new life, for she had only been there a few minutes when a faint color crept up to her pale cheeks and a new light into her dark eyes.

"Ethel," she said, "we do not half appreciate life until we have almost lost it; but there is one thing that sickness does, that is, to test friendship, and yours has stood the test and come out pure gold; I shall always remember you with gratitude and love."

"You cannot realize how I missed you, Marion, for I had planned for us to have such a good time together, and your getting sick

spoiled it all. But never mind; I am glad you are over it, and we will enjoy ourselves all the more.

“I have some news for you,” continued Ethel; “the old Hawthorne place has been purchased by an Englishman, whose name is Weatherstone, and he has made a perfect palace out of it. The family have been here a month and Mamma and I called on them.”

“Did you find them agreeable?”

“Very much so. Mrs. Weatherstone is an invalid, but so pleasant. The two girls are lively and full of fun.”

“What are their names, Ethel?”

“Maud and Luella; then there is a brother whom I did not see; they called him Robert. He has just returned from abroad, where he has been for the last three years.”

“I am glad that you like them, Ethel, for they will be quite an acquisition to the neighborhood.”

“I received a dainty penned note from Mrs. Weatherstone this morning, Marion, and she said they would be pleased to spend the evening with me next Thursday if agreeable. I want you to meet them, so you must come to stay all night with me. I know you will be well enough.”

“Yes, I am sure I will, for I am already feeling myself again, and now, Ethel, let us go to the house, for it is growing a little chilly and I feel the effects of it.”

As they entered the room, Mrs. Roseland met them. “Why, Marion, darling, you have roses in your cheeks. Your airing has improved you.”

“Yes, Mamma, I feel much stronger; air tonic and charming company are very invigorating.”

CHAPTER III

AN UNEXPECTED ARRIVAL

IT was dusk and Marion and her mother were seated in the drawing-room conversing, when they heard footsteps on the gravel walk, and the former, looking up, exclaimed:

“Oh, Mamma, there comes Bertrand!” Quick as a flash she ran to meet him. “Well, this is a surprise,” she continued. “Why did you not write and tell us you were coming?”

“Simply because I was not sure of it myself until the last minute; are you not glad to see me, Marion?”

“Indeed I am,” and to prove her enthusiastic feelings, she threw her arms around his neck and almost smothered him with kisses.

“There, Marion, I believe you; actions speak

louder than words," he said, laughingly, as he released himself from her embrace. Then taking her by the hand, they walked toward where their mother stood.

It was a happy family who seated themselves around the supper table that night; for Bertrand's arrival was a delight to all.

The next morning Bertrand proposed a walk down by the old brook, where they used to play so often when they were children.

"And worry the life out of me by getting yourselves wet so often, why don't you add," laughingly remarked his mother.

"Oh, that part of it was conveniently forgotten, Mother, for the recollection always leaves a little sting, for it brings very vividly to my mind a little oleander switch behind the door," and looking at his mother with eyes fairly dancing, he took Marion's hand and started for their walk. Looking back, Marion remarked:



“ And looking up saw Ethel.”

AN UNEXPECTED ARRIVAL 21

“If Ethel should come, Mother, send her after us.”

“What a lovely place this is in the early spring,” said Bertrand. “When I left Washington it was cold, and there was a driving sleet which chilled one’s very bones, yet here the air is balmy and the flowers are everywhere in bloom. There is no place like ‘the Sunny South’ after all.”

“Yes, Bertrand, I love the old familiar scenes and I do not think I could ever be contented to leave them.”

When they reached the brook, Bertrand pulled some of the moss, which grew on the old oak trees, and made a comfortable seat for his sister by the side of the running water. Then throwing himself at full length beside her, he commenced reading from an interesting book which he had brought with him. Soon they heard the rustling of the leaves, and looking up, saw Ethel.

Dressed in a light, sheer lawn and blue ribbons, her large leghorn hat trimmed with bluebells and daisies, and through the lace which fell from her silken parasol, she looked a vision of loveliness to Bertrand as he jumped up to meet her.

"This is a great pleasure, Miss Ethel," he said, as he extended his hand and shook the small gloved one that was placed in his.

"And your presence to me is a greater surprise," she returned, "for I had no idea of seeing you; won't I give Mrs. Roseland a talking to when I get back! No wonder she was so demure when I asked her where Marion was."

"What did she say, Ethel?" laughed Marion.

"She told me that you were here and that you had left word for me to join you; but she did not tell me that you had company."

"I guess she knew if she told you I was

here, that you would not have come; so I am delighted she showed so much discretion. I hope, though, that you are not disappointed in finding me, instead of only Marion, moping away her time in awful solitude."

"Oh, I will forgive you this time for startling me so," she laughingly replied. "When did you arrive?"

"Last night. I was given a short vacation, and I took advantage of it to come to see how Marion was progressing."

"And I know she will appreciate your visit, for she has been very much worried over not recognizing you when she was sick."

"Indeed, I am glad to see him," put in Marion. "But come, Ethel, and share my mossy seat, and we can all imagine ourselves children again; for this used to be our favorite playground, if you remember?"

"I cannot have such a vivid imagination unless Miss Ethel should consent to our being

sweethearts again and enacting the kissing part," said Bertrand jokingly.

Ethel blushed.

"Shame on you, Bertrand; how could you be so naughty as to refer to that?"

"Well, really, little sister, that is the part most worthy of remembrance in my estimation, and as we are to be children again, I could not see the impropriety of it. But if you both so seriously object, I withdraw the condition."

"How long do you contemplate remaining here, Mr. Roseland?" inquired Ethel.

"About a week, then I must return to my duties."

"I am real glad you are not going away any sooner, as you will be able to be presented to our new neighbors; they are coming to spend the evening with me on Thursday."

"Well, how am I to meet them, when I have not even had an invitation to your social gathering?" Bertrand replied.

“If I were you, Ethel,” suggested Marion, “I would not give him any just to spite him.”

“Seriously, who are these new arrivals?” asked Bertrand. “I had not heard of any.”

“The old Hawthorne place has been bought by a Mr. Weatherstone, and there are two charming young ladies,” answered Marion.

“That is certainly good news, for if there is anything I adore in this creation, it is young ladies!”

Every fiber of Ethel Easton's being was aroused by his very presence! How her pulses throbbed at the sound of his voice!

Yet how calm and complacent he was. Little did he guess how this vision of female loveliness had completely centered her life in his; how hard it was for her to control her very being while she talked on commonplace subjects, and when her heart was thirsting for one sign or look by which to know that there was one responsive chord in his bosom for her. But

no, there was no sign of love in his face as he turned his eyes on her, and not being able to stand the strain any longer, she looked at her watch, and exclaimed:

“Why, it is twelve o’clock! The time has passed so pleasantly that I forgot how it was flying; I must really be going.”

“Do not think of such a thing, Ethel, until you have had luncheon. There, I see Mamma waving to us now,” said Marion.

Bertrand assisted the ladies to arise, and the trio walked toward the house.

CHAPTER IV

LANGLY HALL

THE Weatherstones were English people. Five years before moving to this locality, Mr. Weatherstone, a retired banker of London, while on a tour of the Southern States, had passed through Louisiana and had stopped at this large plantation. Being very much impressed with the place and its surroundings, he inquired if it could be bought. The owners had been immensely wealthy in the days of slavery; but like many others, their money lay in these same serfs. But, for many years, this family had been in reduced circumstances; so much so, that they felt obliged to sell their ancestral home and were very glad to find a willing purchaser.

Mr. Richard Weatherstone had the house

entirely renovated, and turned the cane and cotton fields into beautiful groves, lovely gardens, and flowing fountains. The avenue leading to the house was what impressed him most, being of pearly white shells, ground fine, making this roadway contrast beautifully with the green leaves of the large majestic oaks which lined both sides, and from which hung in festoons the moss of ages. When all was in readiness, he sent for his family and intended to settle in their Southern home.

Mrs. Weatherstone, Maud, and Luella, when they caught a glimpse of their beautiful residence, were completely overjoyed. As they stood on the wide veranda, looking over the vast domain, a feeling of awe engulfed them as if some fairy enchantress had waved her wand, and, at her command, the trees and bushes had mantled themselves, while the fountains played, sending forth their silvery sprays into the perfumed air.

"This is a superb home, Richard," said his wife, laying her hand softly on her husband's arm and glancing fondly at him. "We ought to be happy here."

"I have tried my best to please you," he responded.

"Well, you have succeeded beyond our greatest expectations."

Maud and Luella tripped down the steps and bounded through the walks, until they came to a pretty summer-house built under the spreading branches of a large tree.

"Is this not a grand place, Maud? I never saw anything half so beautiful!" and Luella's large gray eyes opened wide and her face shone radiantly as she took in the grandeur of the scene.

Luella was of medium height, with light golden hair, which hung in long ringlets from her shapely head. She was only seventeen and had not taken to piling up her hair in the latest

fashion. Her complexion was fair and delicate, her step light and elastic; her whole nature brimming over with the joyousness of youth.

Maud was tall and stately, and each movement was the very embodiment of grace; her beautiful blue eyes and classical features would rival any, and her hair was of the darkest brown.

“Robert may be expected any time now,” their father was saying when they returned to the house; “for I received a letter from him to-day to that effect.”

“That is good news, Richard; I think he has wandered about long enough; it is time for him to settle down,” replied the mother.

“And marry one of the country girls,” laughingly responded the husband.

“Not exactly that, but he might take some interest in a place which will some day be his.”

“You are right; his place is here now.”

They had scarcely finished speaking when they heard carriage wheels, and, looking up, saw the vehicle stop, then a gentleman alight and walk toward them.

“Why, there he is now!” exclaimed Mr. Weatherstone, and he started down the steps to meet his son. “My dear boy, how are you?” he continued as he grasped his hand. “We were just talking about you.”

“We? Have Mother and the girls arrived?”

“Yes, they came to-day; so there will be a happy family reunion.”

They had reached the door where his mother was waiting with outstretched arms and tears of joy in her eyes to welcome him home. He clasped her fragile form in his strong embrace and fondly kissed her.

“It is good to be with you all once again, after roving so much,” he said.

“And you will stay with us, Robert?” his mother asked, timidly.

“Yes, Mother, I will remain with you, for truly there is no more restful place than home.”

The girls rushed to meet him and almost overwhelmed him with kisses and caresses.

Robert Weatherstone's sudden home-coming was an unexpected joy that day, and, after a happy evening together, Mrs. Weatherstone suggested that they retire, as all were tired from their journeys.

CHAPTER V

ETHEL'S PORTRAIT

ETHEL lived with her parents in a beautiful home in the town of S——, where they enjoyed all the comforts of life, with money at their command. Mr. Easton had been one of the long-sighted gentlemen of the South, for, just before the war, he had owned a large plantation, and an immense lot of negroes; but when the war threatened, he knew that if the North won, slavery would be abolished, so he sold his plantation and slaves, thinking if the South was victorious, he would be able to buy again.

He then purchased their present home, and they had just become settled when the rebellion broke out. He joined the Southern army and fought bravely, but like many another, he was wounded and left an arm on the battle-field.

Thus disabled, he was sent home. Fortunately, he had means to live on, while most of his planter friends lost all they had and were obliged to face poverty. He let his wife furnish their home to suit herself, but, being a lover of flowers, he reserved the conservatory for himself.

Ethel had been given every advantage, and had now returned home an accomplished young lady. Soon after her graduation, she had her photograph taken, and her father sent one to New York to be painted in oil, life size, by the best artist there. He wished it to be a surprise to both his wife and herself, so he had not acquainted either of the fact.

It had arrived the same evening that Ethel expected her company, so it would be a surprise to Marion as well. Bertrand and his sister were the first to arrive, and Ethel, meeting them at the door, said:

“Come, quick, I have something to show

you!" and she led the way to the drawing-room. Of course, the first thing which caught their eye was the portrait.

"Oh, how beautiful!" exclaimed Marion.
"When did you receive it?"

"It came to-day; do you think it good? It was a total surprise to Mamma and me; one of Papa's gifts."

"There is but one fault that I can see; that is, the artist has not caught the soft, languid expression of your eyes," said Marion.

"That is not the only one," Mrs. Easton remarked, as she entered the room. "The shoulders are not quite broad enough for the size of the head, and I know that is not natural."

"Papa says that he does not like the arrangement of the hair; it is not at all like the photo. My poor portrait! It seems to be full of flaws. You have not as yet expressed your opinion, Mr. Roseland; may I ask you what you think?"

“Why certainly. All I can say is that it is enough like you for one to see how very charming you are.”

Ethel blushed, as she answered: “I might have known you would say something nonsensical; and I ought not to have asked you.”

“It is said that truth often hurts; but in this case it is very flattering,” answered Marion.

“But he does not mean a word of it,” pouted Ethel; “he is only in a complimentary mood.”

A ring at the bell interrupted further conversation. The door opened and the servant announced, “Mr. and the Misses Weatherstone.”

Ethel stepped forward to welcome her guests. She then presented Marion and Bertrand. She noted the quick second glance which Luella gave Bertrand as he was presented to her, and her jealous nature said within herself: “Ah, so he has struck your fancy;

take care, my girl, for I will brook no rival in his affections."

Robert Weatherstone's eye had caught sight of Ethel's portrait, for he was a great lover of the art. When they were seated, he remarked:

"That is a splendid reproduction of yourself, Miss Easton; where was it painted?"

"In New York; Papa surprised us by having it done, and we were just discussing it as you came. From the different opinions expressed, it cannot be very skillfully executed."

"It is not perfect by any means. I can readily see that, knowing as I do, the original; but it is about as good as can be done, copying from a photo; that makes a vast difference. To make a perfect portrait, the artist must copy from sittings."

"I agree with you perfectly," answered Mr. Easton; "so we will pass by the painting's imperfections."

"Robert is quite a connoisseur in the art,"

said Maud Weatherstone; "his gallery at Langly Hall will be well worth inspecting when it is finished; he has already many pictures painted by Watteau, Meissonier, Alma-Tadema, Rembrandt, and Millet."

"He certainly must have a grand collection," replied Bertrand.

"Speaking of art galleries," said Mr. Weatherstone, "reminds me of one I visited before I left England. It was probably the grandest I shall ever enter. It was a noble hall of immense size, being twenty-four feet high and fifty yards long by thirty wide. The ceiling, with its three rows of gray skylights, nine in a row, was grand. The two rows of chandeliers that hung between, made a marvelously radiant shimmer of glass and gold, and when the gallery was lit up at night, it was dazzling and superb. It would be impossible to describe the pictures; but I can speak of a few that represented beautiful women,—

mostly of the owner's ancestral line. There were also grand cavaliers, clad in their shining armor, with helmets, shields, and spears. Art is a subject I never tire of conversing upon." Then he described many of the works of art.

"Let me assure you, Mr. Weatherstone, that we all have enjoyed your description, so much so, in fact, that I, for one, long to visit just such a scene," answered Mr. Easton.

"Yes, Mr. Weatherstone has pictured it so vividly that he had for the moment transported us," said Marion.

There was something in the sound of her voice which startled him, for turning quickly, he said, as he acknowledged the compliment:

"Are you so fond of painting?"

"Indeed I am; but I have seen so few that I am not a competent judge."

"Don't you think that we have discussed art quite enough? Suppose we try music," said

Luella Weatherstone. "Miss Ethel, won't you favor us?"

She arose, and Bertrand Roseland escorted her to the piano. As her fingers flew nimbly over the keys. Mr. Weatherstone seated himself beside Marion and entered into a conversation.

"You have had quite a serious illness, I understand, Miss Roseland?" he began.

"Yes, I overtaxed my strength when at school, and I paid the penalty."

"Do you feel any bad effects from it?"

"On the contrary, I feel ever so much better. I think it has done me good."

"Sickness will sometimes leave good effects," he replied.

"Are you pleased with this part of the world for a home, Mr. Weatherstone, or have you not been here long enough to judge?"

"I cannot say that I have; but if first im-

pressions are correct, I will be very much pleased."

"I suppose it differs widely from other countries which you have visited, for I hear that you have been a great traveler. How you must have enjoyed going from one place to another. That is one thing that I should love above all others: to be able to travel and to see beautiful scenery."

"Where would you prefer going, should you have your choice?"

"I have read so much of the beauties of Switzerland, until I really long to visit there. I think I could stand a trip up Mount Blanc, so enraptured have I grown reading about it."

"I enjoyed my travels," was the soft reply, "until a circumstance happened which darkened my whole life, so that all pleasure was forgotten."

Marion turned her large dark eyes questioningly upon him.

“Your gaze tells me what your lips are too polite to utter,” he continued, “so some time, when we are better acquainted, I may tell you the story of my life.”

“You certainly will have an appreciative listener in me,” was Marion’s gentle response.

“Thank you,” he said.

Ethel had risen from the piano just in time to see Bertrand and Luella disappear through the low, open window, and out on the moonlit lawn. Her soft, hazel eyes flashed for an instant, for her one besetting sin was jealousy, and she knew that she loved Bertrand with a passion untold. Yet he had never given her any encouragement that she could attribute to love for her. This set her very heart on fire, for now might he not give his affection to this golden-haired girl! The thought was maddening!

Soon they returned, and Ethel asked Luella to sing, thus separating them for a while, and



“ Ethel had risen from the piano.”

as Bertrand came and sat beside her, she felt all of her anger melt away. Soon after this, the guests took their departure, Bertrand seeing Luella to the carriage. This act of courtesy created another pang in the heart of the distracted girl, especially as he then took his own departure.

Marion having promised to spend the night with her, the girls went directly to Ethel's room and there prepared to retire. Marion put on a bright scarlet robe, Ethel one of the palest blue, and their long hair falling over their shoulders far below their waists, made a pretty contrast.

“How are you pleased with our new neighbors, Marion?”

“They are charming, quite an acquisition to this place.”

“You seem particularly interested in the brother,” and Ethel looked archly at her.

“Yes, he has such a pleasant voice, a ring of

pathos in it, that makes one think that, at some time in his life, he has suffered."

"Well, you know that the heir to Langly Hall would not be a bad catch."

"Ethel, you ought to be ashamed of yourself, when I have only met him once, and, for all we know, he may have a sweetheart over the sea."

CHAPTER VI

THE VISIT

“MOTHER,” said Bertrand, as he walked into the room where she was sitting, and fondly laid his hand on her shoulder, “I am going fishing this morning with two of my old friends, John Mayers and Charles Ramey. They tell me that the fish are plentiful in the old Bayou, and you know how dearly I love the sport; so do not be uneasy if I am a little late in returning.”

“We will all be out this lovely day then,” his mother replied, “for Marion and I have decided to call on the Weatherstones.”

“Had I known that, I think I would have declined the invitation and accompanied you; for that golden-haired little witch asked me to call.”

“We would have been charmed with your

company, brother," said Marion; "won't you come?"

"Too late, for I am off immediately, as I promised to meet my friends at nine-thirty and it is almost that now; so good-bye; hope you have a pleasant visit, and be sure to remember me to the bright-eyed lassie," he said as he left the room.

"Mother, I am afraid that Bertrand has almost lost his heart to Luella Weatherstone, he seemed very much pleased with her the night he met her at Ethel's; but I hope he will not fall in love with her, for I am sure that Ethel likes him, and I would so much rather have her for a sister."

The carriage was already awaiting them when the ladies made their appearance, and stepping in, the coachman was ordered to drive on.

"We could not have ordered a lovelier day, Mamma, could we?" said Marion, joyously.

“No, Marion, but it being so warm and pleasant now, is a forerunner of a long, hot summer.”

“Well, that is no more than we always have here, but can’t we take a trip to the Lake? I wonder where the young ladies of Langly Hall will spend the summer. I presume it will be at Long Branch, Newport, Saratoga, or some other place equally as fashionable.”

“Why not invite them to join you and Ethel? It would make a pleasant party.”

The bell was answered by the footman, who ushered them into the presence of Mrs. Weatherstone and her daughters.

“What a grand painting that would make,” Marion remarked, as she looked out of the window, after seating herself. “I suppose it has been transferred to the canvas by one of your daughters?”

“Luella is the artist of the family; she is

always running around with her easel and paints, copying the views," said Maud.

"I wish I could faithfully reproduce nature; but after I have finished my sketches, they fall so far short of the original that I am disheartened and disgusted," answered Luella.

"You know the old adage, Miss Weatherstone, 'Practice makes perfect,' so don't be discouraged."

Excusing themselves, the three girls started for a walk through the grounds, but had not proceeded far when they were joined by Robert Weatherstone, who inquired which way they were going.

"We are out on a ramble; would you care to join us?" asked Maud.

"Why, certainly, if agreeable to all parties," and he looked at Marion, who answered:

"Pleasant company is always an acquisition, so do come with us."

Robert bowed in acknowledgment of the



“ They had stopped beside one of the fountains.”

compliment as he stepped to her side, the two sisters lingering, leaving them to walk ahead.

“Your father has greatly improved this place; it would hardly be recognized except the house, which has not been very much altered.”

“It is certainly a very beautiful home; of course I do not know what it was, as I did not see it before he purchased it.”

“It was similar to all the plantations around here, only in a much more dilapidated condition, for the owners were unable to repair it since the war.”

“So I understand. Such a pity! But their loss was our gain, for I think this the loveliest site anywhere about here.”

“Are you satisfied to settle here after the excitement of traveling?” Marion asked.

They had stopped beside one of the fountains, and, as she spoke, she carelessly dipped her finger-tips into the sparkling water.

“Excitement! how well you have named it, Miss Roseland. It was just that, and of a peculiar kind, too, that many would not care to experience.”

“You throw strange hints, Mr. Weatherstone; have you a secret in your life?” She raised her dark eyes and looked at him in a way to penetrate into the very recesses of his soul and draw out what was hidden.

“Yes, Miss Roseland, a very dark one,” he replied, “and you are the only one to whom I have ever spoken of it; but there is some strange fascination about you, that try as I will, I cannot resist.” He hesitated a moment, then continued: “Your sympathy would be a great consolation to me. I have suffered untold agony, and all the more, because I dared not share the secret with anyone. The one who had the best right to it is——” Here he hesitated.

If Marion could only have cried out for him

to share his burden with her! He had her deepest and purest love, and her greatest happiness was in being near him and in listening to his voice. If Robert Weatherstone had only known what a tumult he had created in the breast of the gentle girl by his side, he would have been sincerely pained.

He let his eyes rest on her, and saw that her every nerve seemed to thrill and tremble under his gaze. He was surprised, but pleased, as he saw the blood mantling her cheek.

“Come, Miss Roseland,” he said, “do not let any thought of me make you sorrowful, but take a lesson from the beauties which surround us and be gay and light-hearted.”

She was grateful to him for saying this, so she answered:

“We certainly would be far happier if we thought less of ourselves and more of the grandeur of outward things. I see your sisters; let us join them.”

They stood conversing, never noticing how time was flying, until, looking toward the house, Marion saw her mother and Mrs. Weatherstone standing on the piazza, beckoning to them. The good-byes were said, Robert assisted the ladies into their carriage, and they drove off.

CHAPTER VII

THE LAWN PARTY

“WE will have a pleasant crowd here to-night if all come who have been invited,” said Luella to Maud, as they were performing their toilet on the evening they were to have their lawn party.

Luella was seated before the large French mirror, while the hair-dresser was trying to arrange her rebellious golden curls into something like order, and Maud was putting the finishing touches to her dress.

“Maud, did you hear whether Bertrand Roseland had decided to remain for this occasion?”

“Yes, Luella, I met his sister to-day, and she said that he could not resist the temptation.”

"I am glad, for his handsome face and figure will be quite an acquisition."

"He is quite pleasant, Luella; but I do not see anything about him to rave over; I think him only slightly above the average."

"Everyone to their own way of thinking, sister dear, and mine runs in that direction."

"You have a rival in Ethel Easton, I am afraid, for I saw her watching you when Mr. Roseland was conversing with you that first evening."

"Well, she need not be alarmed, for I am not in love with him yet, but he is good company, and if he honors me with his preference, I shall endeavor to entertain him to the best of my ability. And," she continued, "how about your own admirer, Maud, Mr. De Lacy, who shadows you wherever you turn? Do you consider him on the top shelf?"

"His family is one of the oldest in Louisiana, and besides, he is very wealthy; but I do

not admire him beyond a mere acquaintance, for all that. And now as I am ready, Luella, I shall run downstairs to see if everything is in readiness."

As she entered the drawing-room she met her brother, who looked up with pride and admiration glowing in his eyes.

"How do I look, Robert?" she asked, as she stood before him for inspection.

"Simply beautiful! But what is the use of my telling you that which your mirror had informed you? White is indeed very becoming to you."

"I was vain enough to want your opinion, that is all," she answered.

"Have you seen the pavilion since the decorators have finished it, Maud? Come, let us inspect it."

She slipped her little white hand in his, and together they walked into what might well be called fairyland.

No time or expense had been spared to make this the grandest event of the season. The elements favored the occasion too, for the night was still and clear; the moon was only at her first quarter, while the starry dome sparkled and flashed like innumerable diamonds. The old oaks were hung with numerous Chinese lanterns, casting their varied lights from the different colored encasements. The dancing pavilion was a work of taste and art, the large reflectors making it as light as day, and the floor looked like a sheet of glass, so perfectly had it been polished.

The music was the best the town of S—— afforded. Brother and sister walked around, making suggestions here and there which were immediately carried out, until everything was perfection.

“It seems as if our guests ought to enjoy themselves in this bower of loveliness,” remarked Maud.

“Yes, for we have tried to anticipate their pleasure. If I am not mistaken, I hear carriage wheels, so let us return to the drawing-room to receive our company.”

As the grand strains of music wafted toward the house, the young people gayly went to the pavilion. The dancing commenced immediately, and the beautiful figures of the minuet were followed by the gliding step of the ever-intoxicating waltz. Bertrand Roseland had escorted both Ethel and Marion to the party, and, after having danced with both, he walked over to where Luella was sitting.

“Am I in time to write my name on your programme?” he asked, as he took a seat beside her.

“I have saved one for you, so you see I thought of you, Mr. Roseland.”

“You have no idea how highly honored I feel to have occupied your thoughts even for one moment,” he replied.

Luella turned her bright gray eyes toward him. "You are always ready with some flattering reply," she said, coquettishly.

" 'Many a true word is spoken in jest,' you must remember, Miss Luella, but isn't this our dance? I will not annoy you any more—until the next time," he said, slightly under his breath.

She only smiled, showing him that his compliment was not distasteful to her.

After the dance, Bertrand said, a trifle affectionately: "Are you warm, Miss Luella? Let us take a little walk out in the refreshing air. The next space on your programme remains unfilled; may I hope that you will sit it out in my company?"

"I have no objections, if you will make yourself exceedingly agreeable," she replied softly.

"If trying will do any good, I will succeed," he answered. He gave her his arm and

they passed out into the beautifully illuminated grounds.

Their departure was observed by one person as she stood in the shadow of the music-stand, talking to an ardent admirer. Ethel Easton looked like some ethereal being in her dress of pale blue mull, her fair neck and shoulders gleaming from above her low-cut bodice; a diamond star glistened on her breast, and white japonicas were entwined in her lovely brown hair. She had been much admired and sought after all the evening, and had enjoyed herself as long as Bertrand was within her sight; but as soon as he disappeared, the star of her life seemed to go down, leaving utter darkness behind. She excused herself to the infatuated young man by her side, and went in the direction the couple had taken.

As she descended the steps of the pavilion, she saw the objects of her jealousy directing their steps toward a rustic seat, which they soon

occupied. She then concealed herself within hearing distance of their conversation. She knew this only fanned the flame which had been kindled in her bosom; but some unseen demon had taken possession of her and urged her to listen.

“And you are really going to leave us to-morrow?” she heard Luella Weatherstone say.

“That is unavoidable, Miss Luella; for not being a man of fortune, I am obliged to attend to my professional duties.”

“But your stay has been so short; we shall miss you,” answered Luella.

“It is sweet to be told that by one so charming; it takes half the sting from parting. My lonely hours will be cheered by the picture you present just now; it will ever be in my mind’s eye.”

She did indeed look pretty, dressed in pink organdie and lace, her golden curls caught

back with ribbon of the same hue and her dainty feet clad in pink satin slippers, which were just visible from beneath the folds of her garment.

“I know you do not mean one word of it,” she replied; “my opinion is that you are a flirt.”

“You are extremely flattering,” was Bertrand’s reply, “for I must be something above the average to have the power to control the feelings of others and come out unscathed myself.”

“Oh, that is the view you take of a flirt, Mr. Roseland? You must really admire them; for my part, I think them abominable!”

“I imagine you do, Miss Luella; all your sex are of the same opinion, I presume.”

“Now you are laughing at me, and I am not going to talk to you any more,” was the bewitching reply.

“You will excuse me, I am sure, if I ac-

knowledge being a little amused at hearing a girl like yourself make such an assertion. Now I ask forgiveness; will you grant it?"

"I have a good notion to make you ask pardon on bended knee, sir, but as I see my partner for the next dance coming toward us, I will desist."

"Ah, here you are, Miss Luella! I have been looking everywhere for you; allow me," and he offered her his arm. Excusing herself to Mr. Roseland, she left him. Bertrand walked around the grounds for a while; then suddenly remembering Ethel, he hastened to the pavilion.

Ethel, watching the receding form, broke down and sobbed bitterly; for she was sure now that her rival had taken him away from her. Marion, having missed Ethel, went in search of her also, and, to her surprise, found her weeping.

"Why, Ethel, darling, what can be the

trouble?" she exclaimed, coming upon her suddenly.

"Oh, Marion, how I wish I had never come here! This is the most unhappy moment of my life!"

"Tell me, Ethel, what has distressed you so? I left you talking so pleasantly with Mr. Austin, and now I find you thus."

With her head on Marion's shoulder, Ethel sobbed out all her grievances. Marion had surmised this, for she had noticed the exit of Luella and her brother, but she was in hopes that Ethel had not seen them.

Marion did her best to cheer Ethel, telling her of some laughable things which had transpired during the evening, and succeeded so well that they both joined the rest of the party.

Bertrand met them and asked Ethel to walk with him, just as Robert Weatherstone claimed Marion, and the grand march commenced to play during supper.

Ethel felt her every nerve tingle as she laid her hand on Bertrand's arm; when they were seated, she became one of the gayest there, entertaining those around her with sparkling wit and brilliant repartee, all of which surprised Marion.

Beautiful, stately Maud Weatherstone flitted here and there among the guests, goddess in her robe of spotless white.

"Marion, you are not doing justice to your supper; you have hardly tasted it," said Mr. Weatherstone.

"I am not hungry, for I am feasting on the beauties around me," she replied.

The meal progressed enchantingly, and as they again gathered in the pavilion, eager to dance, Luella's prophecy had come true, for, at every turn, Maud Weatherstone met her ardent admirer, Mr. De Lacy. Soon the guests began to depart, and the first rays of morning began to illuminate the eastern horizon.

CHAPTER VIII

AGITATION

ROBERT WEATHERSTONE, while sitting before his bedroom window, one day after having met Marion, thought how near he had come to explaining all to her, and how thankful he was that he had not, for of what use could it have been? She could not alter circumstances; why overshadow her life with the knowledge?

Thus he argued with himself as the smoke from his cigar was wafted by the gentle breeze far into space, and he thought how much it resembled a human life; here to-day and whirling through space to-morrow. He had made up his mind to go to New York City the next day, but had not acquainted anyone of the fact.

“ They will all be surprised when I inform them, and how shall I evade their questionings?

Well, the emergency of the occasion will have to come to my aid, for I will not tell them the true motive. Why do I keep it from my family?" he mused. "They will be sure to know later on, and why not tell them now? I think I will—and yet no—they would almost drive me mad, and I would be obliged to leave this home where I have known at least a few hours of happiness. No, I shall await circumstances to reveal it to them."

The clock on the mantel chimed the hour of two before Robert Weatherstone laid his weary head to rest. It seemed but a moment ere he was awakened by the ring of the dressing-bell, which he knew he must heed if he wished to catch the morning train.

The family were already assembled at the breakfast table when he entered the room, and, taking his seat, tried to make himself agreeable; but he was absent-minded and uneasy, and his appetite had left him.

“Robert, my son,” said his father, “there seems to be something on your mind. Is it because you are dissatisfied with this place? I fear roving around has had a bad effect on you, and has unfitted you for our quiet way of living.”

“It is not that, Father, for gladly would I settle down here and ask nothing better, if my mind was only at rest.”

“Are you in debt? If so, do not hesitate to let me know, for I will help you to any reasonable amount,” answered his father.

“It is not money matters which trouble me, but——” and a look of incomprehensible pain flitted across his brow.

“Then what is it, Robert? Surely you ought to confide in us,” said his mother.

“I will, sometime, Mother, but do not urge me now.” Then turning to his father, said: “I am obliged to leave for New York this morning; is there anything I can do for you?”

A look of surprise was on everyone's face as he made this announcement, and his father answered:

"Have you urgent business there, that you are called away so suddenly, or is it a pleasure-trip?"

"It is business, sir," and, looking at his watch, he excused himself from the table. "I will have to be getting ready, as it is almost train time."

"When may we look for your return, brother?" asked Maud, a little later as he came downstairs, equipped for traveling.

"It is impossible for me to tell; but I do not think my stay will be very long." So saying, he affectionately kissed his mother and sisters, shook hands with his father, and he was off.

Mrs. Weatherstone walked to the door with him, and laying her hand on his arm, said:

“Robert, won’t you tell me the object of this trip? I know there is something painful, for I could tell it by your face.”

“Your surmise is correct, Mother, and I should have confided in you long ago, but the wound was so sore I could not again open it. When I return, I shall tell you all, for whose sympathy could be sweeter than yours? But keep silent until then, Mother dear.”

“That is a promise then, my darling boy;” and she looked pleadingly at him, her great love shining in her eyes.

“Yes, Mother, and now I must go. Pray for me that I may have strength to bear this great trial.”

“I will, my son.” With another farewell kiss, he descended the steps, stepped into the carriage, and was driven rapidly away.

Mrs. Weatherstone watched the retreating vehicle until it could no longer be seen, then, with a sigh, returned to the drawing-room.

Robert reached the depot just in time to catch the train. While hurrying along, his thoughts were busy with the events of his past life.

On the second day of his journey, he was aroused from his lethargy by a wee toddler of two or three years, who came to him and put her hand timidly on his knee. Robert looked down, and when he saw the little child, he said:

“You are a little darling; will you sit beside me and cheer me up a little?”

“Me ask my mamma,” was the reply, and in a short time she returned and took a seat beside him.

As he looked at this child, his thoughts reverted to another little one who was sleeping her last sleep under the skies of a foreign land. If she had lived, she would have been just about the age of this little one beside him. How his heart was wrung with anguish! But he did not wish her back, for she might share

the same fate as her mother, something worse than death!

After a while, the baby prattle drove all thoughts of self away, and he really enjoyed the rest of the journey. As the train neared New York, he took the child by the hand and going to where its mother was sitting, he raised his hat and said:

“I am so much obliged to you for your little girl’s company; you cannot imagine what a comfort she has been to me.”

“I was afraid she would worry you,” was the answer, “but she took a fancy to you, and I could not very well have kept her away.”

“I am delighted that you could not, for she has transformed a disagreeable journey into a pleasant one, and as a remembrance, would you let her accept this ring which, in after years, she may look at and think of how she made a sad man happy?”

“I do not think I ought to take it for her

for simply amusing herself," replied the mother. The ring was a handsome diamond, surrounded by emeralds.

"Oh, please do not refuse it; for, to offset the value of the ring, is the good she did me."

"Well, under those circumstances, she may accept it, and I thank you very much."

"With your permission, I should like to kiss the child," and seeing that his request was granted, he lifted the little one in his arms.

"Will you give me a kiss before we part? For soon we will leave the train and I may never see you again."

She turned her rosebud mouth to him and he imprinted a kiss upon it. Then putting her gently down, he again raised his hat and left them. The lady, looking after his retreating figure, wondered who he could be.

The train had reached the Grand Central Station, where the crowd was surging to and fro like a great human sea. There were some

whose coming was hailed with delight by the expectant parties waiting for them, and how joyous seemed their reunion! There were others whose coming was met with tears and sadness, as if the news which awaited them was only to add another drop to their already overflowing cup of grief; and some, like Robert Weatherstone, who had no one to meet them.

CHAPTER IX

BLIGHTED REASON

EARLY the next morning, Robert was seated in a cab and being driven through the crowded thoroughfares of the city to one of its rural suburbs. Looking from the window, he could see the lovely lawns and gardens surrounding palatial residences, and, farther on, were waving green fields. All nature was alive with the hum of insects and song of birds; everything seemed gay and joyous, and the air was laden with the rich perfume ascending from mother earth.

But alas for some! All the grandeur of outward things has not the power to raise their broken spirits; for their internal nature is bowed down with sorrow, probing them like poisonous arrows. Robert let his thoughts have full sway until his very heart sickened be-

neath its awful burden of bitter memories. Tears, like a woman's refuge, seldom come to man; nature's forces within him are too strong for that, and when he sees nothing outside of him to fight, with nothing externally tangible to oppose, his force returns within himself and rends him.

Thus it was with him all through that miserable journey. Finally, it came to an end, and the cab stopped before a beautiful cottage, where everything external was grandly beautiful, but when once within its walls, it spoke of something terrible to contemplate. Not of the body; but of the mind, for this was a private insane asylum.

Robert got out of the cab, told the driver to wait for his return, ascended the steps and rang the bell, the summons being answered by the "house doctor" himself.

"Why, how do you do, Mr. Weatherstone? Just step in, sir. When did you arrive?"

“Last night, Doctor, and I hastened here this morning in hopes of hearing some good news.”

“Unfortunately, sir, I have none to impart; hers is a hopeless case.”

Robert bowed his head for a few moments, then said: “May I see her?”

“Certainly,” was the reply; “just step in this way.” The doctor, preceding him through a long hallway, then up a flight of stairs, and stopping at a door near the landing, said: “Listen!”

Robert’s ear caught the sound of a low voice singing as if to a baby. “Is that Una’s voice?” he asked.

“Yes,” answered the doctor. “She has a doll which she rocks all day, thinking it is her baby.”

“Well, let us go in,” said the husband in a husky voice.

The doctor opened the door, and what a

sight met Robert's eyes! There sat Una, his wife, with a doll in her arms. Una, as beautiful as ever, but with the glare of blighted reason in her lovely dark eyes.

"Speak to her," said the doctor.

"Una, my darling, do you know me?" Oh, with what a yearning, craving look he asked this question!

"Oh yes," she answered gayly. "You are the Emperor of Germany." And she arose and made a most profound courtesy.

"Una! Una! I am Robert, your loving husband," he said, as his frame shook with terrible emotions, and he extended his outstretched arms to clasp her to his bosom.

She evaded his grasp, and going to the further side of the room, broke into a loud laugh.

"Ha! ha! my husband! when I know you are the Emperor of Germany. How is it you visit me? I am not a German, am I?" turning to look at the doctor.

“I think not,” he replied.

“Is there nothing that I can say that will recall even a slight remembrance of me to her mind, Doctor? This is breaking my heart.”

“You might try, and I will leave you; but should you need me, tap the button.”

So Robert was left alone with his insane wife. He talked to her of her home, her parents, of their marriage, of the countries they had visited, even of the birth of their little one; everything which could possibly have any interest for her, but it was of no avail, and he received only the most ridiculous answers. Seeing that every spark of reason had indeed fled, he sobbed in the anguish of his heart, for he could not help thinking that if God, in His mercy, had only taken her with the baby, how much better it would have been.

He arose with a sigh, and summoned the doctor.

“Did you meet with any success, Mr. Weatherstone?”

“No, Doctor, her mind is a total blank.”

“I thought as much, but I wished for this test, to be thoroughly convinced.”

Una had again taken her doll in her arms, saying: “Hush, let me lay my baby down; don’t make any noise to wake her, then I can talk to you.”

She walked over to the bed, drew the coverlet aside, and laid the doll in the bed, singing softly to it as she did so.

“Oh, God! isn’t this terrible, Doctor?” the wretched man said, as he wiped the cold, damp moisture from his brow.

“Yes, it is a terrible affliction, surely, and this is the way she is at all times, sir.”

Una turned around and sat down beside her husband.

“Shall I tell you about my baby, Emperor?”

Robert winced as she called him that, then answered:

“Yes, if you will.”

“It seems a long, long time since it was born, and yet it is only a little baby. It is because I won’t let it cry, I suppose. I sing and I sing, so it won’t cry, and it goes to sleep. Have you ever heard it cry, Emperor?”

Her husband could only shake his head, for his heart was too full for reply. Finally, he conquered his emotions enough to say:

“Una, do you know where your baby was born?”

“I told you it was born a long, long time ago, and you ask me that question again; that is silly.”

The doctor shook his head and whispered:

“It is of no use; she does not remember anything.”

Robert’s frame was convulsed, as he bowed his head in his hands.

“Poor man! you have my deepest sympathy; it is impossible to clear her mind, for the veil which shields it is too thick. The light of reason is dead, leaving her shrouded in impenetrable darkness.”

All this time, the unfortunate wife, who had again taken up the doll, sat hugging it to her breast, and, rocking to and fro, sang softly. Finally she arose and said:

“Go out, please; you will wake up my baby.”

Robert sat and looked at her with that calmness which was awful to witness, and the doctor, becoming alarmed, touched him gently on the shoulder.

“Had we not better go?” he asked.

He got up mechanically, and stooping over his wife, imprinted a kiss upon her smooth, white forehead.

She seemed to neither feel nor see him, but went on humming to the doll she held in her

arms. The two men walked out, neither speaking until reaching the door.

“Is there anything you need for her?” Robert asked.

“No, the allowance you made more than covers her wants. Sometimes she raves and breaks her doll, then when the spell is over, we have to give her another.”

“Does she have these spells often?”

“About three or four times a week, and when in one, it is all we can do to hold her. It is pitiable for one so young and fair; when you can see that it has cast a shadow upon your life. Your lot is the hardest to bear.”

“Sometimes, Doctor, when I pause to think of what the last three years of my life have been, it is a wonder I am not bereft of my reason too, for I love my wife, as I imagine few men do. I idolized her! But our dream of happiness was short, as you know, and to end thus is almost unbearable.”

The doctor was silent, only bowing his head. He understood the depth of feeling which had called forth this heartfelt outburst, and he thought it too sacred to be answered by cold words.

The husband understood him, and wringing his hand in token of his appreciation, bade him good-bye, and left the house, which held what, to him, was dearest on earth.

His ride back to the city refreshed him, and just as he was entering the hotel where he had stopped the night before, he was tapped on the arm. Looking up, he saw a young man whose acquaintance he had made on board steamer.

“How are you, Weatherstone? What are you doing here? You are almost as far away from home as I am.”

“Glad to see you, Mr. Armstrong; a familiar face is pleasant to behold in this throng of strangers. To answer your question, I am here on business.”

“And I am, as usual, seeking pleasure, so if your affairs are attended to, you can give yourself over to me and I will show you the sights of our London of America.”

“Thanks, I am at your disposal, for a few days will constitute the length of time I will remain here.”

“Well, to begin with, what do you say to joining a theater party to-night? I am booked for one, and I can rustle up a pretty girl for you.”

“Much obliged, but I am not prepared for ladies’ society, Armstrong.”

“But you will go with me, won’t you? There are some fine plays on the boards.”

Robert thought this would be the very thing to drive all harassing ideas from his weary brain, so he gladly accepted.

“Well, it is a bargain then, Weatherstone; I will call for you at four, and we will drive around sight-seeing until time for the play.”

Promptly at the hour mentioned, Beverly Armstrong was at the hotel, and together the two young men entered the carriage and were driven to the most attractive parts of the city.

“By the way, Weatherstone, have you been to New Orleans, yet? No? Why, what are you thinking of, so near your home, too? This winter I will be at home, so will expect you to pay me a visit; will you promise?”

“Certainly, I have been thinking about going to the city, but having left it until so late, the warm weather set in and I knew it would be more pleasant to go elsewhere in the summer time.”

“You are right; winter is the best time. I think you will be pleased with our city, for we have a number of interesting places that will prove attractive to you, I believe.”

“Do you intend remaining here for the summer, Armstrong?”

“No, I shall take a run down South when

the notion strikes me; so much for being a man of means, a gentleman of leisure, I might say. One can go and come whenever one pleases, without feeling the inconvenience of one's purse strings tightening."

"Yes, money is a great promoter of happiness, but it does not constitute all," answered Robert.

They conversed until the carriage stopped before one of the largest theaters in the city, and the young men got out and entered. The play was "Hamlet," and so absorbed did Robert become in watching Booth's wonderful acting, that he forgot himself entirely.

After the play, the friends had a sumptuous repast, making it quite late before they returned to their hotel. Mr. Weatherstone's stay in New York was made very pleasant; for Beverly Armstrong had all the hospitality and impetuosity of the Southern people, and he thought nothing of trouble to make his friend

enjoy himself, for he had taken a great liking to this quiet, dignified Englishman. One thing in his friend's character he could not fathom: that was, his persisting in refusing to meet any of his lady acquaintances. He had even gone so far as to decline an invitation to spend the evening at Armstrong's sister's home, for fear of meeting some young ladies.

Had Robert known that his friend's sister was the mother of the little girl he met on the train, how gladly would he have gone. He extended his stay for a week; then he told Armstrong that he must leave for home. The latter was sorry to part with him, and if it had not been for his numerous engagements ahead, he would have gone South with him. With a parting injunction: "I will see you some time this summer," Beverly Armstrong watched the receding train as it carried his friend away.

CHAPTER X

MOTHER AND SON

AFTER Robert Weatherstone's return from New York, he was seated in the library, his head in his hands, his elbows resting on the desk, and thinking over his past life, for that subject was ever present in his mind. There came a gentle tap on the door and, opening it, he found his mother standing there.

"May I come in, my son?" she asked.

"Why, yes, Mother," and he placed a chair for her to sit down, then took one opposite.

"Robert," she began, timidly, "you promised to tell me why you went to New York. Will you redeem it?"

"I will, Mother, at this moment."

He hesitated a while, then began:

"Mother, I am a married man."

“Married! Married! Oh, Robert, and you never told any of us!”

“Had I continued happy in my married life, I would have told you, but, Mother, only one short year and then—but let me begin and tell you all.

“Two years ago yesterday, I was sitting on a bench in one of the parkways of the beautiful city of Naples, and looking out on the lovely bay. The sun was just sinking in the cloudless, western heavens, and the placid waters beneath seemed to rise with the rounding of its polished bosom to the huge luminary, as though he was some mighty magnet drawing it up. One could not look a moment into the blinding ardency of the western atmosphere without weeping, so charged was it with the ceaseless gushing of the crimson glory. It seemed to palpitate, contract, and dilate, like a lake of liquid iron, newly poured from the heart of a blast furnace.

“But the waters of the bay were soon changed to a tender, deepening turquoise against the orange reflection in which the eastern sky was bathed, and the rippling of it was exceedingly delicate.

“Oh, Mother, how well I remember it! That scene is stamped indelibly on my mind. As I was looking with admiration at this grand panorama of nature, a young girl passed me; in her hand she held a book which slipped from her grasp to the ground. I stooped to pick it up and our eyes met. What eyes they were! Dark as night and fathomless as the ocean. They stirred every emotion within me, and her voice, as a low ‘thank you’ came from her lips, was like music.

“She passed out of sight, but not out of my memory. I was half tempted to follow her, but fearing I might frighten her, I deterred. Her eyes haunted my vision, and the sound of her voice was ever with me.

“ I retraced my steps to my boarding-place and inquired of the lady of the house if she knew such a person as I described to her, and she told me it could be none other than Una Starley. ‘ Her father is a poor painter,’ she said, ‘ and their residence is not far distant.’

“ It seemed that when I heard her name that it just suited her, its sound was so soft and sweet, and I determined to make her acquaintance; so I told Mrs. Brockley that I would like an introduction, and it was arranged that I should go with her that evening as a purchaser of some of Mr. Starley’s pictures.

“ Their home was a humble cot, indeed; everything spoke of poverty, but was spotlessly clean. We were invited in. Of course, my eyes wandered about the room in search of the figure I wished to see, and there, in one corner, sat Una. She left the room as we entered, much to my disappointment, but I was pre-

sented to her parents; then Mrs. Brockley told our errand. I saw at a glance that they were well-bred people, and I was pleased, for, oh, Mother! my heart had already gone out to that gentle girl, and I knew I loved her.

“Mr. Starley had some fine paintings which he presented to my view, some of which I bought; one in particular struck my fancy. It was the Bay of Naples by moonlight. I have it yet and will show it to you. After a short conversation, we arose to take our departure, when, to my great delight, Una came in to speak to Mrs. Brockley, who at once introduced her to me. I can recall the sensation I felt, even now, when that low voice spoke my name and her lovely eyes met mine. It will never be forgotten.

“I visited her often after that, but always in the presence of her parents, until one evening I could stand it no longer; for I knew I loved her with a pure love, and I wanted to tell her;

so I asked her to take a walk. At first she hesitated, then her mother said:

“ ‘Una, you may go, but do not stay out late.’

“Her face flushed with pleasure, and my every nerve tingled with sweet anticipation as we walked out together. How vividly is that night’s picture stamped on my memory! The light of the moon was so brilliantly clear that I could witness every varying expression in my companion’s face as plainly as if a shining dawn had broken; only that the moonlight gave a spirituality to her beauty, and her eyes sparkled, as she said:

“ ‘I was afraid my parents would object, and oh, I wanted to come so much.’

“ ‘Well, they agreeably surprised you,’ I answered, ‘and now we will wend our way to the bench where I was sitting the first time I saw you; for, Una, I have something to ask you.’

“Mother, I shall never forget the look of mingled pain and pleasure depicted on her countenance when I told her of my love and asked her to be my wife. Slowly her tears began to flow, as she answered:

“ ‘I love you with all my heart, but marry you I never can. You would not ask me if you knew the shadow which hangs over me, debarring me from ever going to the altar with anyone.’

“We talked for a long time; but she could not be persuaded to tell me her secret. Finally, I said: ‘Let us return to your home, and I will ask your parents’ consent.’ I did so; they hesitated, then the mother spoke:

“ ‘Mr. Weatherstone, I am sorry for this, for we believe your love for Una to be sincere, but, sir, there is a fatality hanging over her head that we must tell you of, then if you are afraid, we beg and pray of you to go and leave her.’

“ ‘ Tell me what it is, Mrs. Starley, and let me be the judge,’ I answered, and, without anything further being said, she told me that there was insanity in the family and that they were afraid that Una would inherit it. I answered: ‘ If you will give her to me, I will risk it,’ for, Mother, I could not give her up.”

“ The terribleness of the consequences never dawned upon me until the calamity came after we were married.”

Here Robert paused; his face visibly paled and his hands clutched at his heart.

“ My son! my son!” the mother cried. “ Is what is to be told yet so awful? Why not wait until you are not so wrought up? Why not let your nerves rest, then you can continue.” She took her handkerchief and wiped the great drops of perspiration from his forehead.

“ No, Mother, I will finish now,” he answered.

She handed him a glass of wine, which he drank, and then proceeded:

“ We were so happy for one short year. We lived only for each other. I took her traveling, and she was so enthusiastic over the things we saw that it gave me pleasure to watch her. Then—oh, my God! When I think of it, it seems so cruel. Mother, our union was going to be blessed, and how pleased we were over the prospect! Una wanted to go home for the event, and I took her. There she gave birth to our baby girl, which lived only two days; then she—oh! how can I tell it! she, my wife, my darling, my own, had lost her reason!”

He looked up and found his mother silently weeping.

“ Mother, it was almost a deathblow to me, for we had planned to give you all a surprise after baby came, but she wanted to be with her mother until after that event, and then we were coming home.

“I had the best medical aid that could be procured; but all to no avail. They told me that she could never be cured. I thought that in London she might be helped, and I took her there; but received the same discouraging reply. Then I brought her to New York and placed her in a private asylum, but these doctors, also, told me that there was no hope of her ever recovering her reason. Do you wonder now at my not wanting to tell my errand?”

“No! my poor boy, how you have suffered! My heart bleeds for your terrible misfortune. Yours is a darkened life, indeed!”

“And, Mother, just think, nothing but death can break the chain which binds her. Oh, it is cruel! cruel!”

His mother arose, and walking over to where he was sitting, put her arms around his neck and drew his head on her bosom, and there his feelings gave way and he sobbed out some of the gnawing pain.

CHAPTER XI

PRELIMINARIES

MAUD and Luella Weatherstone were seated in their handsome boudoir, discussing the prospective trip; for Marion and Ethel had told them where they had decided to go, and had asked them to join the party.

"I think we will have a delightful time, Maud. It is just the kind of place where I should like to spend the summer," said Luella.

"Yes, it will be very quiet, but for my part, I would like to go where there would be more excitement."

"And where your charms could be exercised more on the opposite sex," said her brother, as he entered the room.

"Aren't you ashamed, Robert? That is no such a thing," Maud retorted.

"Yes, that is a fact, my tall, stately sister;

you would like to go where every girl vies with her neighbor in fine dressing, and the number of conquests she can make. But if I was not satisfied, I would go where I pleased and let Luella do the same."

"I do not want to go alone to a strange place; that is why I have consented to be one of the party," answered Maud.

"Party? Who are going?" asked her brother.

"Ethel Easton and Marion Roseland. There will be a quartette," was the reply.

"Why, I should like to join that party myself, and would, had I been asked."

"Well, I will issue you an invitation," said Luella; "come and go with us. Your company will be highly appreciated."

"Wait, not so fast. What if the other two should object? Besides, I would be like a fish out of water, being the only male; but this I promise: after you are comfortably settled, I

will come for a week or two, just for the good of my health."

"That will be splendid," replied Maud, "then I will feel more at home."

"Where is this Southern watering-place that you have decided on?" asked Robert.

"It is at M——, in Mississippi, right on the lake shore, where we can go bathing and do just as we please. I am simply carried away with the description of the place. Wait until you see me coming to meet you, Robert," said Luella, "with my figured lawn dress, my sunshade, yellow cotton umbrella, and large palmetto fan. You will be struck by my appearance."

"You will certainly look different from what you usually do," laughed her brother, as the picture she presented flashed across his mind.

"Luella is always thinking of something ridiculous," said Maud.

“Well, may she always be as gay and joyous-hearted, and may life’s shadow fall lightly upon her golden head,” he said, as he drew his younger sister to him and kissed her.

“Will there be many people there?”

“Why, yes, all the houses along the bluff will be occupied during the summer. Some of the *élite* of New Orleans go there for recreation,” answered Luella.

“That ought to satisfy Maud, then; she can dress as fine as she likes as long as there will be plenty to admire her.”

“Now, Robert, do not raise my expectations by holding out such flattering prospects, for I expect to lie in the hammock and read or sleep my time away. I really do not expect to enjoy myself, only have a lazy summer of it,” answered Maud.

“I have an idea that you will be agreeably disappointed; for why should those girls select a place where one would not have a pleasant

time? Ethel, like yourself, would not like to hide her beauty, knowingly.

“Look here, Robert Weatherstone, let me inform you that all good-looking girls are not vain,” retorted Maud, for she was beginning to feel nettled by her brother’s persistency.

“They who are not are the exception, not the general rule,” laughed her brother. “I will tell you, Luella, what will enliven your summer resort for Maud,” he continued: “get her a beau as soon as she arrives there who will play the devoted, and let her do as she pleases with him, as she has been doing with half the young planters around here, then she will be satisfied.”

Robert left the house and walked down one of the lovely paths which led to a shady, secluded nook by the side of an artificial pond; there he threw himself down beside the placid water, and let his thoughts dwell on what his sisters had told him of their trip.

“So,” he thought, “there are to be four of them, and Marion Roseland is to be one of the number. How quickly the thought of her decided me to join them. Strange, but when I am in her company, I feel at rest. Somehow, her voice soothes and comforts me, and when those wondrous dark eyes look into mine, the glance thrills my very being. Poor Una! if my love for you was not so deep, it would wander into the keeping of that small maiden, and from her actions, I know it would not be distasteful to her.

“Why should I bury myself because this great misfortune has darkened my life? Ought I not to get some enjoyment? My poor darling would not wish me to live the life of a hermit, I know.

“But if she could only know! Then what happiness would be mine. Marion Roseland would pale and fade away beside the dazzling beauty of my Una; but fate has willed it other-

wise, so out of the bitter dregs of my lonely life, I will enforce some sweet to counter-act it.

“Oh,” he thought, “why are we mortals so infinitely foolish? We set a snare for ourselves, knowing full well the consequences of stepping into it. We enter because the allurements we see please our senses; then after enjoying ourselves up to the extent that we dare go, we would then retrace our steps. It is then, in that predicament, we feel our environment.

“Well, the more I think of my life, the harder it is for me to know what course to pursue; so I will let events take the lead and I will follow.” With that conclusion, Robert fell into a great slumber.

CHAPTER XII

SUNNYDALE

THE day that the four girls were to start on their summer trip dawned clear and bright. Already Old Sol had made himself felt, and large fans were brought into requisition as they assembled at the station, with friends and relatives to see them off and wish them a merry time.

Robert Weatherstone had singled out Marion, and they were walking up and down the platform, carrying on an animated conversation.

Marion looked almost pretty, dressed in her tasteful white robe and large hat trimmed with ribbon and flowers of crimson hue, which well became her raven locks and lustrous dark eyes.

“And you really think you will enjoy yourselves?” he was saying.

“Why, yes, we can’t help it, for there are so many ways to kill time. When you are tired of one occupation, you can find pleasure in another,” replied Marion.

“Will there be room for one more, in about a week, Miss Marion?”

“If you are alluding to yourself, Mr. Weatherstone, why yes; we shall be delighted to have your company.”

“Well, I think you may look for me about that time, for I will be lonesome and want a change of scenery.” His blue eyes twinkled with merriment, for he well knew that the girl at his side would resent that.

“If that is what you are seeking, Mr. Weatherstone, I am afraid our Southern town will disappoint you; so I would suggest your going to Niagara Falls or the National Park; they are both noted for their magnificent

scenery." As she said this, she caught his eye, the merry glance from which reinstated her good humor.

"No," he remarked, "I did not mean that at all. I only said it to see those dark eyes flash. The true reason is, the society of you girls."

"One advantage about the place will be that it is so near home that if we do not enjoy ourselves we need not remain."

"My prediction is, Miss Marion, that you will have such a splendid time you will elongate your stay."

"The future will tell," she laughingly remarked, as the conductor's 'All aboard' was heard, and the girls were assisted into the train; then good-byes were exchanged, and the great steam horse bore them away.

Their time was so fully occupied that they were surprised when they were told they were nearing their destination. Gathering up their scattered paraphernalia, they stepped off the

train, but were a little dismayed on looking around, seeing only a few houses, scattered here and there.

“Can this be the place we have selected for our summer vacation?” sarcastically exclaimed Maud.

“If it is, things do not look very promising,” answered Marion.

Just then an old negro came toward them and said, bowing profoundly:

“’Cuse me, ladies, be you the ones who am ’spected at Mrs. Warner’s?”

Their faces brightened, and they answered him in the affirmative.

“Jest step dis way, and get in thur car’age. I be the coachman, at yo’r servis, ladies,” and with all the airs that a negro is competent of, he opened the door of the carriage, and the girls entered.

The station was situated about two miles from the beach, and the road lay through a

thick forest of pines. Looking at the trees, Luella said: "Those remind me of umbrellas with long handles. See how tall they grow before they branch out."

"Yes, but I would not like to have to hold one of them," laughed Ethel, to whom pine trees were no novelty.

"Oh, my, we must be nearing the Lake!" exclaimed Maud. "Don't you feel the cool breeze, girls?"

"Yes, it is like coming out of a hothouse into a refrigerator to feel that delightful zephyr," replied Marion.

Said the coachman, listening:

"Yes, ladies, we'll be dar soon; the Lake am not a great ways off now." As he spoke, the placid water came into full view, looking smooth and calm, as the sunlight played on its surface.

An exclamation of delight burst from the lips of the girls as they saw the transformation

of the scenery from a forest of pine trees to a decidedly little village. It was a pretty place; the houses were situated in a line on a high bluff, below which was a beach of lovely white sand, on which a number of children were having fine sport, building sand houses and digging deep wells. Beyond this was the lake, studded with bath houses and wharves. The girls could hear the murmur of the water as it lapped the pebbly beach, and they were charmed with the sound.

“We’s at de stoppin’ place now, young ladies,” said old Sam, as he drew his horses up before a lovely, old-fashioned house, which was raised about four feet from the ground, with steps ascending to the wide gallery which ran the whole length of it. A lovely honeysuckle vine twined itself around the trelliswork, perfuming the air with the delicious fragrance of its blossoms.

A tall, stately lady, with a decidedly aristo-

cratic air, stood ready to receive them. The introductions being over, Mrs. Warner said, turning to Marion:

“And you are the daughter of Amy Dysart, my old schoolmate. I should have known you by your resemblance to her. Just think, we have never met since your mother was about your age; that was when we were at school. How time flies! It does not seem so long ago since we were playing our childish pranks together.”

Soon the supper bell rang out loud and clear, and the hostess led the way to the table. How inviting everything looked, and the young people did full justice to the delicious viands set before them.

“I expect my husband and nephew on the late train, to-night,” said Mrs. Warner; “the latter will be somewhat surprised and not a little overjoyed to find the house filled with so many charming girls.”

“Such a bevy of us are liable to frighten him, should he come upon us unawares,” answered Maud.

“Not much danger, Miss Weatherstone, for he is a full-fledged society man; so anything like a party of young ladies is not likely to discommode him.”

Luella smiled to herself as she remembered what Robert had told Maud about trying to make a conquest of the first man she saw. The latter felt Luella’s mischievous eyes bent upon her, and her face slightly colored as she changed the conversation, by remarking:

“What a delightful place this is for the table, Mrs. Warner.”

“Yes, the breeze can circulate freely, and we get the benefit of it.”

The house was built with a large hall through the center, with rooms on each side, and the back gallery was a continuation of it. Beyond this was a grape arbor of immense proportions,

from which hung clusters of green grapes. To the side of the arbor, were the negro quarters.

When the repast was finished, Mrs. Warner advised the girls to go to the summer-house, where they would find it very pleasant. Each took their light cashmere shawls, thrown lightly over their shoulders, and the different hues made the group form a pretty picture.

“Isn’t this delightful?” said Ethel, as they all stood on the bluff, looking down at the glimmer of the white sand beneath them. The moon was just rising, looking like a huge ball of fire, and as it slowly ascended, it threw its silvery rays over the surface of the water, making it shine and sparkle.

“It is, indeed,” answered Marion, “but hark, I hear carriage wheels.”

CHAPTER XIII

LOVE AT FIRST SIGHT

THE girls looked in the direction from which the sound came, and, sure enough, they could just distinguish the outlines of a vehicle as it stopped before the gate; two gentlemen alighted, then proceeded up the walk to the house.

“ They must be Mr. Warner and his nephew. I do hope the latter will prove agreeable; for then this place will not prove so dull,” said Maud.

“ Are you going in for a flirtation the first thing, my sister? I am really pleased that he has come, or you might have exercised your charms on Mr. Warner, then there would have been trouble.”

“ Come, girls, don't let us appear rude by

standing here, gazing at them in this manner; they will surely think that we have come from the country," said Ethel.

The gentlemen proved to be Mr. Warner and his nephew, Beverly Armstrong. While the girls had been discussing him, the latter was greeting his aunt.

"Have you started a young ladies' seminary, Aunt Grace?" he asked, looking toward the girls.

"Not exactly, but did not your uncle tell you that I had consented to have those four girls board with me for the summer?"

"Uncle was too much engrossed in that last speculation of his to think of such a flippant subject as that; but who are they?"

Mrs. Warner told him their names.

"And you say that that tall, stately girl, with that lace scarf thrown gracefully over her head, is Maud Weatherstone?"

"Yes, and I do not wonder, Beverly, at your

singling her out, for a more beautiful girl I have never seen. Ethel Easton is lovely; but her beauty is soft, while the other's is grand," replied the aunt.

While she was talking, Beverly Armstrong was thinking that the name of Weatherstone sounded very familiar, and he was trying to recall where he had heard it. Suddenly, the thought struck him that it was the same as the young Englishman's whom he had taken such a liking to on board the vessel.

"Aunt Grace, where do those Weatherstone girls reside?" he asked.

"They all come from S——, in Louisiana. Why? Have you ever met them, Beverly?"

"No, but now I am quite sure I am acquainted with their brother—the sly fox, never to even intimate that he had such charming sisters, although he did invite me to visit him." Then Mr. Armstrong told his aunt what little he knew of Robert Weatherstone.

“Well, he may visit the girls while they are here, so it will make it very pleasant for you,” she answered. “Now come and have your supper, for your uncle is growing impatient. I will present you afterward.”

The girls were chatting gayly when Mr. and Mrs. Warner and their nephew made their appearance.

“Enjoying the moonlight, young ladies?” said Mrs. Warner.

“Indeed we are; we have just been remarking on its beauty,” answered Luella.

“Allow me to present my husband and my nephew, Mr. Armstrong.”

The girls bowed, and there being a vacant seat beside Maud, Beverly took it, while the other girls looked knowingly at each other and smiled. At first their conversation was general; but gradually Maud and Mr. Armstrong talked to each other in subdued tones.

“You don’t know how pleased I am to meet you, Miss Weatherstone; for I am well acquainted with your brother.”

“Indeed, may I inquire where you met him? I am sure he was very remiss not to have informed us of his knowing you.”

Beverly Armstrong told her where and when he had met Robert, remarking: “I took a fancy to him the first time I saw him; his manner was so quiet and dignified that it had something of the mystery about it. Then when we met again, we had a delightful time, and that now I have met you, I consider myself fortunate, and if I may express my opinion, you interest me, also, for your style is so entirely different from the generality of the young ladies whom I have met that I could have guessed you to have been English.” He looked admiringly at her, as the faint color mantled her cheek at the implied compliment.

“Yes, we are English people, but we are fast

becoming Americanized, as we intend to make this country our home," she replied.

"Are you pleased with the exchange?"

"Delighted, Mr. Armstrong. We have a beautiful home," and she told him all about the plantation her father had bought, fitting it up in palatial style, and then said:

"We like the Southern people; they are so sociable and hospitable; so different from the English. Then I like the United States because each and every one has an equal chance of making a fortune, and if a man has the natural ability, he can even become President. Now, in England, if you are born a commoner, you are almost sure to remain one unless you are exceptionally gifted or you do some great deed of valor; then you are rewarded. But such cases are only for the chosen few."

"I thank you, Miss Weatherstone, in behalf of the Southerners, and only hope that your good opinion will extend to new ac-

quaintances,” and his liquid eyes rested inquiringly on her.

“ You may have no doubts on that subject, Mr. Armstrong, for I am extremely well pleased with Mrs. Warner; I think her a lovely lady.”

“ And how about your humble servant, may I ask? ”

“ I will tell you later on; our acquaintance is of too short duration for me to pass an opinion. I might judge you wrongly, and you would never forgive me.” She smiled roguishly at him. “ Do you think,” she continued, “ that we four girls will be able to find amusement here to keep us from ennui, Mr. Armstrong? ”

“ Why, yes, you see for yourself that all of the summer-houses within reach of your eyes are filled with young people; even the benches on the wharves are crowded, and have you noted the number of carriages which have

passed along the road? You will have a good time, I can promise, for when a party of young people gather together, there is bound to be fun."

"Do you come here every summer?" asked Maud.

"No, last year was my first experience. I generally go North to some fashionable watering-places, but I became tired of them. Have you ever been?—no—then you have not missed much, for all is sham and show, nothing natural or real, each one trying to outdress the other, and in this, I include both sexes, for the men are as bad as the ladies, are all led by Dame Fashion, and if you do not follow in her footsteps, you are considered queer and eccentric. Here, you can do as you please, and yet have a good time."

"I came very near not coming, Mr. Armstrong, for I had an idea that it would be very lonesome. I even tried to persuade Luella to

go North with me, but she declined. Not wanting to go among strangers alone, I consented to come."

"Well, 'it is an ill wind that blows nobody good'; I am glad that she refused to go, for then I would have lost the pleasure of meeting you, Miss Weatherstone."

"If we have as pleasant a time as you picture, I certainly shall not regret my choice. Are you going to remain here any length of time, Mr. Armstrong?"

"I came for a two weeks' vacation only, but now."—and there was no mistaking his look—"I do not know how long I shall remain."

The other girls, by this time, were trying to suppress yawns, but Maud had not the slightest indication of sleep, for she found Mr. Armstrong very entertaining, and, she acknowledged to herself: "Never before have I felt such a satisfaction in being entertained."

Mrs. Warner noticed that the girls were



“ Well—we shall meet again to-morrow.”

fatigued, so remarked: "You all must be tired after your journey, so I propose retiring."

"And we second the motion," said Luella, as they rose to leave.

Maud and Mr. Armstrong were obliged to follow, much to their sorrow. As they were nearing the house, the latter said, consolingly:

"Well, one good thing is, we shall meet again to-morrow." Maud answered him with an assuring smile and a slight inclination of her shapely head.

Mr. Armstrong, as he stood watching the receding form of the girl he had become so extremely interested in, was a very distinguished looking man of thirty years; of a true Southern type, tall and slender, with brown eyes, fringed with dark lashes, brown, wavy hair, and drooping mustache of a lighter shade, which partly concealed a firm and finely shaped mouth. His face was bronzed by the sun, though his complexion was naturally fair.

They were wealthy people, but notwithstanding that, Mr. Armstrong held the lucrative position as bookkeeper for his uncle, preferring work rather than idleness. His parents resided in the most fashionable part of New Orleans, and, being the only son, he was a petted child of fortune. But for all that, Beverly Armstrong had come out unharmed in every sense of the word. He had moved in the highest society from boyhood, and had seen all the feminine beauty which no city can boast of more than New Orleans. But he was not to be caught as he had reached the age of thirty, everyone believed him to be a confirmed bachelor. Now, the very first sight of this English girl had stirred chords in his breast which had never vibrated before, and he knew that he could never rest until his heart was safe in her keeping.

CHAPTER XIV

A PROPOSAL

THE girls had no cause to complain, for visitors came from miles along the coast to call on them. Every evening there was something new to interest them, and, during the day, they would congregate first at one house, then at another, for lawn tennis, croquet, or something else just as agreeable.

Two weeks after their arrival Beverly Armstrong was lying in the hammock, awaiting the girls' arrival from the bath. He had a novel in his hand, but his thoughts would not concentrate themselves upon it. Finally, he closed the book with a bang and let it drop to the floor of the gallery, then gave himself up to the pleasure of thinking. His reverie was a delightful one, judging from his counte-

nance, for, every now and then, a smile would pass over it and he would turn his head toward the bath house.

Soon the object of his affections emerged from the bath house, coming up the wharf. He could distinguish her silvery laughter as it came, wafted toward him through the perfumed atmosphere. "Suppose she should refuse me?" he mused. The very thought made his brain reel. "One thing is certain, I will not stand this terrible suspense any longer; I am determined to hear my fate from her own exquisite lips to-day."

The girls soon passed the summer-house, and as Maud neared it, she spied Mr. Armstrong, and said: "Playing solitude, Mr. Armstrong?"

"Yes, Miss Maud, and I am extremely tired of it. Will you not take pity on my loneliness, and give me a few minutes of your valuable time?"

The other girls had only bowed and passed on.

“Why, certainly,” Maud answered. “After such a speech, how could I refuse? But first, I must go into the house and make myself more presentable.”

“Don’t be long, for I will await your reappearance very impatiently,” he replied.

Maud found her companions resting themselves, and they inquired if she was not going to follow their example.

“No, I am going out to talk with Mr. Armstrong, as he requested it of me.”

“Look here, Maud,” said Luella, “don’t you trifle with him as you have with many others, for I think it would break his heart. We all know that he is desperately in love with you, and it would be cruel to spoil a life like his!”

“Thank you, little sister, for your timely warning; little he knows what a lovely cham-

pioness he has." She kissed Luella and went out.

"Did I keep you waiting very long?" she asked, as she sat down beside him.

"In reality, only a few minutes; but to me it was an eternity."

"Are you enjoying yourself here, Miss Maud?" he said.

"Indeed I am; but I have you to thank for most of my enjoyment, Mr. Armstrong."

"I am pleased to know that I have contributed toward making your stay endurable. The other night at Mrs. Bowers's you ought to have been extremely happy, for you certainly did not lack attentive admirers."

A look of disgust was depicted on her lovely face, as she answered:

"All the gentlemen there were so insipid—present company excepted—they could do nothing but dance and talk love."

“Do you object then so seriously to our sex telling you that you are the object of their affections?” he asked.

“Not if it was the right one; but to be eternally told how beautiful you are and lots of other things equally foolish, when you know full well that they do not mean one word they are saying, is disgusting!”

Mr. Armstrong could not help laughing at the frown which wrinkled her lovely forehead, and the toss she gave her shapely head.

“Miss Maud, suppose a man who was in dead earnest should tell you all that, what would you say?”

She hesitated a moment, and then with heightened color, answered:

“If I liked him, I should encourage him; if not, I would do just the opposite.”

Beverly's fine face flushed as he eagerly caught her hand in his and said: “Maud, I love you; will you be my wife?”

“ Oh, Mr. Armstrong! Do you really mean that? ”

“ Mean it! Yes, from the very depth of my heart. You have been in my thoughts ever since I first saw you, and the more I see of you, the more my affections have been stirred. My love has become the ruling passion of my life. Tell me, darling, is there any hope for me? ”

Her beautiful eyes fell before the steadfastness of his gaze, as she answered: “ Would it seem unmaidenly in me if I said that I reciprocate your feelings? ”

“ Oh, my dearest! can it be possible that I am blessed with your love? I can hardly restrain myself from clasping you in my arms right here. I will try, I assure you, to be worthy of you. Tell me, Maud, had I been too timid to propose, would you have hidden your affection from me as successfully as you have done? ”

“Why, of course, you stupid man. Do you think I would have you tell me in after life that I did the proposing?”

He laughed as he answered: “Well, you have queer ideas in that lovely head of yours. Now that need not worry you, for I have proposed.”

“And I have accepted,” and she blushed vividly as she said it.

“I can hardly believe it is possible, my own one, that I am to be the possessor of such a prize. How I wish we were not in such a conspicuous place, for I am dying for a kiss to seal our engagement.”

“Well, we are here, so you will have to content yourself with holding my hand. Now tell me something of yourself; for you must remember I know next to nothing of the man I have promised to marry.”

He told her all the particulars of his life and his prospects, ending with: “And you will be

mistress of one of the loveliest homes in the old city. How proud I will be when I see you installed there."

She looked up at him and smiled, pride beaming in her beautiful eyes, as much as to say: "It is not all on your side, for I am equally proud."

"Shall we let our secret be known?" he asked.

"I am afraid you will betray us by your actions. If you think that you can be discreet, then we will not divulge it for a while."

"It would not do to make so rash a promise as that, for I might break it," he answered, laughingly.

"Well, then, you may inform your aunt and uncle and I shall tell the girls, so that our conduct cannot be criticised if we sometimes overstep the bounds of propriety."

"That means if they sometimes see me steal a kiss."

Maud only blushed and smiled.

The glad light in Maud's eyes, and the lovely flush on her cheek told the girls more than words could.

"Well, we congratulate you, Maud," said Marion. "Have you accepted him?"

"How do you know that he has proposed?" she answered, laughingly.

"By your looks, which betray you," said Ethel.

"Yes, girls, he did propose, and I—I accepted him."

"You are to be congratulated, surely," said Marion, "for he is a perfect gentleman."

Luella looked so highly elated over the idea that Maud said: "Really, little sister, I am delighted that you are so pleased," and she threw her arms around her and hugged her.

The second bell sounded, and they all proceeded to dinner. At the table, Mr. Warner remarked:

“Beverly, your two weeks are up; are you going to return to your post of duty?”

“I am afraid not, Uncle, if Charley Delaine will be my substitute for a month or so longer.”

Luella, who was seated next to Maud, whispered:

“Iron chains could not force him away now,” at which Maud blushed and Mr. Armstrong looked knowingly at her.

“I suppose he will be only too glad of the chance, and as he is a good bookkeeper, I won’t mind the change. So you can stay as long as you like,” answered Mr. Warner.

“Thank you, Uncle, I surely appreciate your kindness.”

“I was young once,” he replied, as he looked lovingly at his wife. “So I know how you feel to be drawn away from such bewitching company.”



“We’s at the stopping place, ladies.”

CHAPTER XV

A PLEASANT SURPRISE

“WE shall be obliged to make some calls to-day, girls,” said Marion, as they were going to breakfast.

“All right,” rejoined Luella, “we shall see what Mrs. Warner thinks about it.”

“Were you speaking to me?” said that lady, as she appeared.

“Marion was saying, Mrs. Warner, she thought it advisable to go visiting this lovely morning,” replied Ethel.

“Certainly, I know that you will enjoy the ride; what time shall I order the carriage for you?”

“About nine, please, as it will be better to go soon to avoid the heat of the day,” said Marion.

Mr. Armstrong looked at Maud with such a pleading and insinuating glance that that young lady could not fail to understand; so she replied with a bow of assent, as much as to say: "I am really obliged to go with them, but if I consulted my own feelings, I should much prefer remaining home with you."

Immediately after breakfast the girls went to perform their toilets, and a pretty picture they formed when ready for their journey; even Marion looked fascinating in her deep cream organdie and scarlet ribbons. Maud and Ethel were beautiful pictures, worthy of any painter's brush, and Luella was quite petite.

Thus thought Mr. Armstrong, as he assisted them into the carriage, but no one could fail to notice the look of admiration and love he gave his intended, as he handed her to her seat.

"Do not be gone long, please," he said, "for the time will be unbearable until your return."

"No longer than we can help," rejoined

Luella, at which they all laughed; for they knew that it was meant for Maud alone.

It was a grand morning; a pleasant breeze was blowing from off the water and the dazzling sunlight made the lake sparkle and shine, and each little wavelet danced with glee, as it moved on its way toward the beach of sand, which spread out like a great white sheet until it reached the high bluff. The girls were in gay spirits, laughing and chatting, and now and then, Sam, the driver, would join in with some of his queer negro dialect. They made quite a number of calls and returned home about one o'clock, just in time to do justice to a delicious luncheon which was spread before them.

"After you finish eating, girls, I have a surprise for you," said Mrs. Warner, smiling.

"Oh, do please tell us!" exclaimed Ethel.
"We shall not be able to finish, out of sheer curiosity, if you do not."

The other girls also pleaded, but in vain. Mrs. Warner remained firm until they gathered around her in the big hall, when she said: "Nabsha went to the postoffice this morning for the mail, and we all received a letter," and she handed them around.

Ethel's was from her mother; Luella's from a girl friend; but both Marion's and Maud's were from their brothers. A dead silence had fallen on the group as each one perused the contents.

"Mrs. Warner," Maud said, "brother Robert says he is dying of lonesomeness, and thinks he will take a trip here to see how we are enjoying ourselves."

"And, Bertrand, my brother," said Marion, "also says that we may expect him soon, as he has been granted a vacation. Oh, I am so glad," she continued, "for I do so want to see him."

Ethel and Luella exchanged glances to see

how each took Marion's news, but neither betrayed her feelings, though Ethel's heart beat hard and fast, for she felt that a crisis would be reached, and the one he loved best would soon be cognizant of the fact.

"Won't you welcome Robert, too, Marion?" asked Luella, with a knowing twinkle in her eye.

"Why of course, I am always glad to see old friends," answered Marion, a becoming flush mantling her brow.

"Well, young ladies, when do the gentlemen expect to arrive?" inquired Mrs. Warner.

Both girls looked at the date of their letters, and an exclamation of surprise escaped them for they were expected that very evening, by the early train. Telling Mrs. Warner that, Maud said:

"Could you accommodate them, Mrs. Warner? I know that they would rather be with us than go to a strange place to board."

“I have a spare room, and if they would not mind occupying it together, they will be welcome,” she replied.

“Oh, thank you, Mrs. Warner; I know that they will enjoy rooming together,” said Marion, “that is, I can speak for Bertrand.”

“And I think that I can safely answer for Robert,” answered Maud.

Nothing else could be talked about the remainder of the day but the expected arrivals. Even Maud contented herself, for Mr. Armstrong, not expecting them until evening, had accepted an invitation to go fishing with some young men, and did not return until after the carriage had been sent to the station. He had been unusually successful on his fishing trip, for he carried a large bunch of fish, most of them being speckled trout.

“What a lovely supper we will have, Beverly,” was Maud’s greeting, “and now I must tell you the news. Robert and Marion’s

brother, Bertrand, will arrive here this evening."

"Good, I shall be delighted to see my old friend again. By the way, did you tell him that I was here, Maud?"

"I did not, for I wanted to punish him for not telling us that he had met you."

"He will be surprised when he sees me, but the greatest surprise will come afterward, when he learns of our engagement. But I flatter myself that he will not raise many objections."

"And if he did, Beverly dear, they would have no weight with me; I could marry you anyhow."

"Bless you, my own darling, for saying that, for if I should lose you now, life would not be worth living," and he kissed the beautiful face which was so very near his own. Not knowing the rivalry between Luella and Ethel over Bertrand, he continued, turning to the former:

“Now, Luella, you will have to amuse yourself with Mr. Popenjay.”

An angry flush suffused her face, as she answered: “Excuse me, I detest Warren Popenjay, and if he persists in his attentions, I will soon let him know it.”

“You would not wound his little heart with anything so unkind and cruel as that, would you? Cupid has already sent his arrows and pierced that enough,” said Mr. Armstrong.

At this, they all laughed, even Luella, for she thought that perhaps she might have a tall, handsome, blue-eyed man escort her around, while Ethel would have to fall back on someone else.

“Now, ladies,” Mr. Armstrong was saying, “if you will excuse me, I will make myself presentable,” and he bowed himself away.

“Come, girls, it is time for us to dress,” said Maud, “and you three must put on your most becoming costumes and look your prettiest.”

"Trust us for that," answered her sister.

"Maybe Mr. Popenjay will join us to-night, Luella," said Maud.

Luella's temper arose and she was about to make some angry retort, but checked herself, for she knew it would be of no use. Maud would only say something more about that horrid little dude who had taken a particular fancy to her, and was with her every chance he got, even sending her lovely bouquets of flowers, and she hated to hurt his feelings by sending them back.

Just before the arrival of the carriage, the girls made their appearance, looking fresh and lovely, though the faces of both Marion and Ethel bore a look of expectancy, which the others lacked. They all seated themselves on the long front gallery, and tried to converse; but that proved a failure, each being occupied by thoughts much more interesting than any that could be expressed aloud.

It was an affectionate meeting when Bertrand and Robert arrived, for three of the girls, at least.

“Well, how did you happen to come on the same train? Was it a preconceived plan between you?” asked Maud.

“Why no; we were as much surprised to meet at the station as you are to see us,” answered Bertrand.

“It made the time pass pleasantly on the train,” said Robert. As he was talking, his eye caught sight of Beverly Armstrong, who was standing on the gallery.

“Why, Maud,” he continued, “who is that gentleman? I am sure I have seen him before.”

“Why, of course you have. It is your Southern friend whom you met in New York.”

“And you never once intimated to me that he was here,” he replied.

“You never told us that you were ac-

quainted with a New Orleans gentleman, and I wanted to play even."

"Well, you have," he answered. "I must go and speak to him."

Mr. Armstrong saw him advancing, so with hand outstretched, he hastened to meet him.

"Welcome, old fellow, to my aunt's home," said Armstrong. "I am glad that our acquaintance is going to be renewed."

"Well, Armstrong, I was never so surprised as when I saw you, and more than pleased," replied Weatherstone, as he shook his friend's hand. "The girls played me a neat little trick to get even with me, by not letting me know of your being here. Why, I should have been here a week sooner, had I only known it. But I was afraid to come for fear of being the only man."

"Well, you see, I have been the only one since they have been here, and I have found it exceedingly pleasant."

Conversation was interrupted by Marion, who had come forward to present her brother to Mr. Armstrong.

“By George! he is a handsome fellow,” he thought, as he shook hands with him. “Pity his sister has not some of his looks.” Then both gentlemen were introduced to Mrs. Warner, who said:

“You see, gentlemen, I have taken good care of my charges.”

“You have, indeed,” answered Mr. Weatherstone. “I never saw them all looking better.”

“I know that you must be hungry,” said Mrs. Warner, “so, Nabsha, show the gentlemen to their room, and when they are ready, we shall have supper.”



“It was a jolly party that sat down to supper.”

CHAPTER XVI

EXCHANGING CONFIDENCES

It was a jolly crowd that sat down to Mrs. Warner's supper-table that evening. At times it was a perfect bedlam, but with all that, they enjoyed it.

"You are both in time to enjoy our excursion party over to the island, day after to-morrow," said Luella. "We expect to have a glorious time."

"So glad we came, are you not, Weatherstone?"

"Indeed I am, Bertrand," he replied, "for enjoyment is something I need to shake the blues which I have been indulging in lately."

"Oh, we can dispel them, I warrant you, Weatherstone," said Armstrong, "for I have caught you in that mood before."

“Your kindness on that occasion, Armstrong, will always be appreciated and never forgotten, I assure you. For the benefit of the party, I am going to give a brief sketch of my stay in New York, and how you took pity on a perfect stranger, making him enjoy himself.”

“Now, really, Mr. Weatherstone, please do not be too emphatic in your praises, or I will be obliged to leave until you finish.”

“No, it shall be nothing but the truth,” answered his friend. When he had finished, the party was lavish in its praise of Mr. Armstrong, his kindness and forethought, all of which he took good-naturedly. Then he proposed to walk to the end of the wharf. This proposition placed Bertrand in quite a dilemma, for he did not know which to ask to accompany him, Ethel or Luella, but finally thought he would settle the difficulty by asking them both, so he said:

“Will you two ladies accept my escort?”

He was almost positive that one would decline, and his supposition was correct, for Luella answered:

“Thank you, Mr. Roseland, but you know the old saying, ‘Two is company; three is a crowd’; so I will remain here, as I have an interesting book which I would like to finish.”

“Very well, Miss Luella, please yourself; I will not take any exceptions.”

The others had already started, so Ethel and Bertrand followed. Her lovely face beamed with pleasure at having the man she loved walking by her side, and she even thought kindly of the rival who had remained behind.

Bertrand thought that he had never seen her look so beautiful, and he could not fail to notice the glad light in her soft hazel eyes, and the flush of joy which suffused her face. His heart warmed toward her, for, he thought, had Luella cared anything for him, she would not have given up the contest so easily.

Ethel saw that she had gained the advantage over Luella, for never before had Bertrand been so solicitous about her.

"You must be worn out," she said, "studying so hard; no wonder you wanted a vacation."

"Yes, Ethel, it has not been play, I assure you, but you see this is my last year as a student. After that, I shall commence work on my own responsibility, and my success all depends on my knowledge as a physician."

"I hope that you will rise and be able to stand among those who rank highest."

"Thank you, if good wishes will help, I shall succeed," and his blue eyes looked so bewitchingly at her that every nerve of her being was thrilled with sweet emotion.

"Do you know," he continued, "that even while I toiled, visions of your lovely face would float before me, lightening the burden."

How her heart throbbed exultantly at this,

but she answered, just to try him: "Have you not made a mistake, Bertrand; were not the visions of golden tresses, instead of brown?"

"I really do not think that I was mistaken in the color, but if I was, what effect would it have had on you?"

"That question is too pointed to be a fair one; you will excuse me, I am sure, if I decline to answer it."

"You need not, for your eyes tell me you would have been greatly disappointed. Now, what do you think of my egotism?"

"It is certainly past my understanding," she said, laughingly. Thus they continued to talk until Ethel could not comprehend whether she had any hold on her companion's affections or not.

In the meanwhile, Marion and Robert Weatherstone were carrying on an animated conversation; the latter was just saying:

"Do you think there is an understanding

between her and Mr. Armstrong, Miss Marion?"

Marion turned her dark eyes, full of mischief and fun, toward him, as she answered:

"Do you think it exactly proper for me to betray Maud's confidence, by telling you what she has intrusted with me?"

"Undoubtedly I do, for have I not the right to know?"

"Of course, Mr. Weatherstone, but she should be the one to inform you, not I."

"I would rather listen to it from your lips so long as you are in the secret."

"Well, I will tell you. They are in love with each other—engaged. There, now, is your curiosity satisfied?"

"Certainly, but their love-making was brought quickly to the focus of an engagement; don't you think so, Miss Marion?"

"Yes, but what is the use of dallying under

such circumstances, when each party knows his own mind? ”

“ Don’t you think it necessary to study each other’s disposition a little before placing one’s self under the yoke? ”

“ No, Mr. Weatherstone, my opinion is that even a long engagement will not make you able to discover the true character of the other; only marriage brings that out.”

Robert felt the force of her words, so he only answered: “ I see you are disposed to take sides against me, so I will ask you something about yourself. Have you been killing time agreeably? ”

“ Indeed I have. I do not think any of us have regretted our choice of this place for our summer outing.”

“ I suppose you have never given one thought to the poor friend you left behind? ” he asked.

“ If you mean yourself, Mr. Weatherstone,

I have thought of you many times, and wondered if you were going to keep your promise to visit us here."

"And you, Miss Marion, have been in my mind almost continually, which ought not to be!"

"Why won't you tell me the barrier that is between us?" she said impulsively, and then blushed at her own impetuosity.

He did not seem to notice her tone, but answered: "I have made up my mind to tell you, Miss Marion. No one knows it but my mother, and those who are obliged to, but my life is hungering for sympathy, which I know and feel that you alone can give."

Her large dark eyes looked so soft and askant at him, while the pity depicted in her sweet face was so eloquent that he longed then and there to unfold his life's secret. But he desisted, not wishing to spoil their first meeting, so he said:

“To-morrow, if we can stray off alone, I shall tell you.”

While these young people were enjoying themselves on the wharf, Luella had just fixed herself comfortably in the hammock to read, when she heard footsteps, and, looking around, saw Warren Popenjay coming toward her. She arose very reluctantly, as she greeted him:

“Good-evening, Mr. Popenjay.”

“Aw—good-evening, Miss Luella; aw—how very fortunate to find your lovely self alone. It is just simply heavenly.”

Luella made a weird face as she offered him a chair.

“I saw that you had company,” he continued, “but was doubly pleased to see that it was not, aw—your fair self they had come to see.”

“Yes, it was my brother, and Mr. Roseland, Marion’s brother.”

“Aw—well, I do declare, how puffedly chawming.”

Then there was a short pause, in which Luella made up her mind not to be at all entertaining to the love-sick young man before her.

“Miss Luella—aw—well—I have something I would like to tell you, but—aw—I do not know exactly how you would receive it. You know by my actions, aw—that my very being is being consumed by a fire of love that your lovely, aw—image has kindled, aw—do you think—aw—I mean will you accept this love?” After delivering this speech, he heaved a sigh of contentment, as if pleased with himself for being so clever, and thinking that the object of his affection before him could not possibly refuse him after so much eloquence.

“Really, Mr. Popenjay, I appreciate the honor you do me by offering me your love, but I am sorry I cannot reciprocate.”

“Oh, Luella! aw—star of my life, do not say that; how can you be so cruel when you

know—aw—my very life is bound up in you? Why, aw—if you reject my love, I will do something awful—awful! Do you hear me, Luella?” and the young man sank down upon one knee before her.

Luella was convulsed with laughter at the figure he cut, his little head just rising above his high collar, and his watery blue eyes rolled up toward her with a most love-sick expression. The perspiration stood out on his forehead, whether from the heat, or from intense feeling, Luella could not tell; but she said:

“Do get up, Mr. Popenjay, someone will see you.”

“Oh, if you will only say, aw—you will be mine, aw—I would not care if the whole world saw me, aw—at your feet.” But he took her advice and arose.

“I am sorry to disappoint you, but I can never love you, Mr. Popenjay.”

“Well—aw—all hope for happiness for me

is o'er—has entirely vanished, aw—all pleasure is ended and I will, aw—be a lonely man.”

“Do not take my refusal so much to heart; you may yet find a young lady who can appreciate your noble qualities.”

“Aw—no,” was the lovelorn reply. “Good-bye, Miss Luella, aw—you may never look upon my face again; but try to think kindly of me, for to get rid of a vision of golden tresses, aw—and flashing gray eyes, my poor soul may, aw—take refuge in peaceful death.”

“I beg of you not to do anything rash,” she said, as she bade him good-bye.

After he had gone, Mrs. Warner came out of her room. “Forgive me for eavesdropping, Miss Luella, but I was sleeping when your friend came and when I awoke he was in the midst of his eloquent proposal, so I did not dare to interrupt him and was obliged to hear it.”

Luella burst out laughing, in which Mrs.

Warner could not help joining, as the former remarked:

“ Did you ever receive a proposal like that, Mrs. Warner? ”

“ No, I was never so fortunate.”

“ Unfortunate, you mean; the little idiot, did he suppose I would go through life with such a thing as he by my side? ”

“ He certainly did, or he would never have proposed. I have heard that he thinks himself irresistible.”

“ Maybe by refusing him, it will lower his estimation of himself.”

“ I doubt it; such as he have very little brains.”

CHAPTER XVII

THE EXCURSION

THE next day it rained so hard that no one went out. The young people amused themselves as best they could, the girls helping Mrs. Warner prepare the luncheon for the excursion, and to get everything in readiness for the next day.

The gentlemen had been playing billiards; but tiring of that, Mr. Roseland took up a magazine to read and Mr. Armstrong had retired to a corner of the room to have a confidential talk, the subject of which was the fair Maud. What the ardent lover was saying must have been entirely satisfactory to the brother, for he nodded his head in silent approval as the girls entered the room.

The rest of the day passed and no oppor-

tunity afforded itself in which Robert could relate to Marion his life's history, so he whispered to her, as she was retiring for the night: "To-morrow, when we are alone, I will tell you what I promised."

The morning dawned bright and beautiful, the birds were whistling their sweetest notes, and the flowers, which, before yesterday's rain, had held their heads drooping from their stems, were now raised in all of their beauty and grandeur. The Cape jessamines gave out their richest perfume, and the white-and-pink oleanders added to the loveliness of the scene. All was serene on land, but the lake showed signs of disturbance and discord from yesterday's storm, for the waves were chasing each other in their angry race toward the shore.

"Do you think it advisable to go on the lake this morning, Mrs. Warner?" the girls asked.

"Well, the weather is so beautiful that I

think the water will subside, but even if it does not, you have experienced sailors to guide the boat, so you will have little cause to fear. But wait and see what the decision of the rest of the party will be."

It was soon evident what their intentions were, for a crowd had gathered in the summer-houses. There were ladies in lovely light dresses and sailor caps, and gentlemen in cream and light blue sailor suits. Mrs. Warner's party soon joined them, and then all went down the wharf, where they were to go by skiffloads to the schooner, which was anchored a short distance out in the lake.

"Your dismissal has not had very much effect upon your late admirer, Miss Luella," whispered Mrs. Warner, who, with quite a few of the elder ladies, had come to see the party off.

"No, he seems as spry as ever; he is incapable of feeling deeply," answered Luella.

Just then the gentleman in question stepped lightly up to her, and, extending his hand, remarked:

“Good-morning, Miss Luella; aw—you look as bewitching as ever, and, aw”—sinking his voice lower—“you see, aw—I have conquered my poor feelings to such an extent, aw—that I can now gratefully accept your friendship, aw—and value it highly, aw—you can’t imagine what a terrible time, aw—I had to subdue my raging passion. You would pity me, I am sure.”

Luella could hardly keep from betraying the perfect disgust which she felt for him, as she answered a polite “Good-morning,” and turned away, leaving him staring after her.

There were twenty-five young people on the schooner, and when the sails were set they started on their trip.

For a while the wind was just brisk enough to carry the small vessel skimming along the

surface of the water, and the large waves could be seen dashing against its side as the boat glided rapidly along. Everyone was in the brightest of spirits, talking, laughing, and singing songs appropriate to the occasion. But, alas, such enjoyment cannot always last. Poor little Warren Popenjay! As he was trying to play the agreeable to a pretty maiden in pink and white he felt his stomach heave and his head reel, then he turned a greenish cream color.

“Why, what is the matter with you, Popenjay?” exclaimed Mr. Armstrong.

Warren, with a sickly smile, tried to answer: “Nothing much,” but at the same time made a hasty retreat to the rear end of the vessel, there to wrench his poor body almost in two.

Of course, there was a general snicker at his expense. “But he laughs best who laughs last,” and one by one, nearly the whole party had succumbed to seasickness.

The wind had changed in the opposite direction and the waves had risen to billowy whitecaps, tossing the vessel hither and thither, and making the girls of the party deathly sick. Some of them were continually asking if there was any danger. Of course, the answer they got was always in the negative.

For five hours they continued; then the wind lulled and they headed toward the shore, for as the sickness wore away, the party became desperately hungry. They landed and found that they were only fifteen miles from home at a place called "Mayer's Bayou." The crew was awfully sorry to disappoint them, but all said that even this would be enjoyable to what they had experienced.

There was a lovely grove on the shore and the place seemed as if fashioned by nature for a picnic, with its soft spots of velvety grass, overshadowed by large trees. By two o'clock

everyone had gathered to dine, and everything looked inviting to the hungry folks. The snow-white cloths were spread on the ground, and on them were placed the contents of the numerous hampers which contained every delicacy which the season afforded. When the gay company was seated, they made the woods resonant with laughter and merriment.

“Come, Miss Marion, let us go for a walk,” said Robert Weatherstone, as he gave her his hand to assist her to rise.

They strolled for quite a distance, then seated themselves in a secluded little nook, and Marion’s heart thrilled with violent emotion as the man she loved reclined beside her, knowing, as she did, that he was there for the express purpose of opening his heart to her. There was a short pause, then, looking into her dark eyes, he seemed to take courage, and he related to Marion the same story he had told his mother. While reciting it, Marion’s

lovely eyes looked pityingly on him, and filled with tears.

He had kept his eyes cast down until he had nearly finished, then looking at her suddenly, saw the pearly tear-drops fall. "And you really sympathize with us that much?" he asked, as he caught her hands in his. "I was almost sure you would, yet I feared to tell you."

"How nobly you have borne it!" she made reply. "How noble you are!"

"Don't call me that, for many a time have I been tempted to end my troubles in the solitude of the grave, and had I been certain that they would have ended there, I should not have hesitated, but the dread of an everlasting punishment stayed my hand."

"Oh, my dear friend! What a terrible thing it would have been for you to have taken your life. Far better live this life of bitter pain than to end it before it is called."

“But, Marion, you do not know half I have suffered! Sometimes, I have thought I too would go insane; for I loved Una with a love unspeakable, and to have her thus—oh, God, it is almost unbearable!”

“Calm yourself, my friend, and think only of your one short year of happiness. Can you not realize that there are some lives that never have a ray of sunshine to illuminate their darkened pathway; all is dismal and gloomy.”

“Well, Marion, they are to be pitied,” he said as his handsome face brightened.

“You have borne your grief so well in the past that perhaps in the future it will become easier.” As she said this, she slightly pressed the hand which held hers.

“The load seems lighter, already, since I have made you my confidante, little one. Your dark eyes remind me of hers; they were the first thing to draw me toward you. Then your gentle ways were similar, and I have blended

your two images together in my mind ever since I made your acquaintance, and it comforts me."

Marion dropped her eyes and suppressed a sigh, for she knew now that her life was to be a barren waste; that the strong arm beside her would never be hers to lean upon.

"You have lifted a load from my mind, Mr. Weatherstone, by confiding in me, and maybe, at some future time I can give you some words of comfort."

"I really feel better now, Marion, but, my little friend, do not suppose for one instant that every time we are alone that my troubles will be the theme of our conversation. We shall, with your permission, avoid the subject, for I only wanted your silent sympathy. And now let us join the rest of the party, for it must be almost time to be wending our way homeward."

When they arrived, they found everything

in the greatest confusion, and, on inquiring the cause, were told that Ethel had nearly been drowned.

Ethel had been feeling quite elated all day, Bertrand having shown quite a preference for her company. When Luella had asked her to go for a row down the bayou all by themselves, she consented willingly. They got into the skiff and were going rapidly down the stream, when Ethel, standing up for a moment, fell headlong into the water.

Luella screamed, but no one seemed to hear her, the rest of the party being at too great a distance for her voice to reach them, but fortunately, there was one who thought he heard a cry of distress, and he ran in the direction from which the sound came; as he drew nearer the bayou he distinctly heard Luella's cries. It was Bertrand who had made his appearance in so timely a manner.

As he saw the gleaming brown head rise to



“He brought her safely to the bank.”

the top of the water his heart gave a great thump. It was but a second's work to throw off coat and hat and plunge into the water just in time to catch the girl's clothes as she had risen for the last time.

He brought her safely to the bank, but she was unconscious. Both he and Luella worked faithfully until signs of returning life rewarded them, and as Ethel opened her eyes and looked into the face which bent with so much anxiety over her, she smiled, then closed them again.

This made Bertrand forget the presence of Luella, for raising Ethel's head until it rested on his shoulder, he lowered his and kissed her pearly cheek, calling her his darling, his own.

It was more than Luella could stand to listen to these protestations of love for the girl, although she knew that her feelings for him had never been deep, yet her pride was hurt. She turned to walk away, and this brought Ber-

trand to his senses; so, calling to her to return, he said:

“Miss Luella, we must get Ethel into the skiff and take her home, for she will take cold in her wet garments.”

Ethel heard him, and answered before Luella had time to do so: “I think, with your assistance, I shall be able to get in myself.” She felt equal to almost anything now, being sure of Bertrand’s love; notwithstanding her wet clothing, she felt a warm flow of mingled joy and pleasure suffuse her whole being at the thought of his kiss upon her cheek, though she made no sign to show that she remembered it.

When they entered the boat, Bertrand rowed with rapid strokes to where the rest were gathered, and great was their astonishment when they learned what had happened. The ladies took Ethel in charge, and took her to a house a short distance away, where both she and

Bertrand were supplied with clothes while their own were being dried, and when Marion and Mr. Weatherstone made their appearance, the commotion had almost subsided.

When things were put in order they were soon sailing smoothly homeward, the breeze being just stiff enough to fill the sails nicely.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE BONFIRE

“You will not put off our marriage any later than November, will you?” Mr. Armstrong was saying, as he and Maud were sitting under a large pine tree. They had strolled out for a confidential chat, as the girls expected to return to their homes very soon.

“Why, I do not see how I can be ready in that short time; I have my trousseau to get and a thousand and one things to attend to, Beverly.”

“It does not take long to get a trousseau, darling, for you can buy everything ready made.”

“How do you know that, sir? Have you ever bought any?” she said, laughingly.

“No, but I have heard Mother say so, and

now promise me, for even that length of time will seem a century to me."

"Suppose Papa and Mother will not give their consent, then what shall we do, Beverly?"

"Now, you just want to annoy me. I know they will, for your brother says so."

"Well, I suppose I must adapt myself to your proposition, as I see no alternative."

"My sweetheart!" and he caught her in his arms, nearly smothering her with kisses.

Hand in hand, they walked up the long lane which led toward the house. It had been a sultry day, but now, as they neared the coast, a soft breeze came from the water, which felt very refreshing.

"Here are the stragglers!" exclaimed Luella, as her sister and Mr. Armstrong made their appearance. "Don't you both feel ashamed? You have kept dinner waiting for half an hour."

"See how penitent we look," Beverly re-

plied, as he put on a very sanctimonious air, but with mischief dancing in his eyes.

“Yes, we see it,” said his aunt with a laugh, “so get ready and come to the table.”

Soon they were all seated and doing justice to the savory meal.

“We have a surprise for you, Maud,” said Ethel. “Sam and Nabsha have been out all day gathering pine knots and dry pine brush to make a large bonfire on the beach to-night; won’t it be lovely?”

“That is just the thing!” exclaimed Beverly. “Strange we did not think of that before.”

“It might be for you, but you are excusable,” answered Mrs. Warner, at which both he and Maud changed color, while the others thought it a splendid joke.

“Aunt, I think you are incorrigible; you never miss a chance to tease.”

After dinner, they all gathered in the sum-

mer-house; on the beach everything was in readiness for the night's illumination. It was a grand sight. At first, the fire spread a pinkish cast on the pearly white sand around it, then as the dry pine brush was heaped upon it, the hue changed to fiery red, which reflected on all the objects around, and, as the flames and sparks shot upward, they illuminated the bluff for a great distance, and threw its reflection on the surface of the water.

The most of the young folks, finding it too warm to remain on the beach, went to the benches on the wharf. Bertrand Roseland asked Ethel to take a walk; so excusing themselves, they left the rest of the party. As they walked along, Mr. Roseland began:

“Ethel, do you know that the fright you gave me has decided my feelings toward you? Had you drowned, life to me would have been a barren waste, and the very thought of losing you,” he continued, in a low, soft, plead-

ing voice, "made my heart ache, and I knew that nothing but the purest love could create such emotion. Look up, darling, and tell me if a reward awaits me?"

Ethel raised her eyes, which now had a gleaming light in them. "Is it possible, Mr. Piper, that you wish me to dance to the first tune you play," she asked, laughingly. "My heart is not to be conquered so easily, and surely, when it takes so long to decide between two girls, your love for either cannot probe very deep."

"Why, Ethel, I did not know that you could be so bitter; don't turn away from me, now that I have discovered my true feelings toward you! Be merciful, Ethel, and give me some encouragement."

How handsome he looked, with his head bent toward her, and the flush of excitement stamped on his brow. How she longed to throw herself in his arms and tell him that she

was his, and had been since the day she graduated. But pique stood between her and this acknowledgment. She thought he ought to be punished, for had he not made her suffer? So she answered:

“Really, Mr. Roseland, your declaration is rather sudden; you will have to give me time to consider the question.”

“Ethel, have I been deceived in your actions toward me? There were many times when I thought you cared for me; when I was even jealous. Tell me, was I so very much mistaken?”

“I cannot give you a definite answer now, so let us join the rest of the party,” and she arose to go.

“Ethel, I cannot stand this; the suspense will completely unman me! Do give me some little encouragement! Do you think I can leave to-morrow on this uncertainty?” and he caught her hand and held it.

“Please let me go, for I cannot answer you now.” But something in her voice made him thrill with joy as he looked at her; and what he saw in her face reassured him, for he caught her in his arms, and she, letting her head rest on his breast, took refuge in tears.

He held her tightly clasped for many minutes in silence, then said:

“I know, my darling, why you have acted in this manner, and I glory in your independence; but, Ethel, if you will only stop to think, you will see that I acted conscientiously, and knowing my love for you now, I can brook no delay. I was surprised at your answer, I must acknowledge, for I felt that you loved me; that is what made me speak now. Kiss me, my darling.” She raised her beautiful face, all bedewed with sparkling tear-drops, and touched her lips to his—then he continued:

“Ethel, sweet one, may I ask your parents when we return?”

“Won’t that be too soon, Bertrand?” she replied, softly.

“No, darling, for I long for you to be wholly mine.”

“Suit yourself and I will have no objections,” she answered.

“Thank you, Ethel; now I am as happy as Mr. Armstrong seems to be; how very much in love he and Maud are! In their case, riches will marry riches and they will live in grand style. But never mind, darling, I intend to make a mark in the world, and we, too, shall be rich some day.”

“We won’t be very poor, ourselves,” said Ethel with an arch smile.

“No, but it will not be your money; I want to make some of my own.”

“Well, I love you just as much as if you were laden with riches, Bertrand dear, so do not let that disturb you.”

“It makes my heart rejoice to hear you

“speak that way, my sweetheart, but even then, I will try to win a name of which we both can feel proud.”

“Which I have every confidence in your doing.”

After that flattering speech, Bertrand took her in his arms and kissed her many times. Looking up, he saw the whole party coming toward them, and snatching one more kiss from Ethel's lovely lips, he proposed that they should go to meet them.

The fire had died out by this time and nothing remained but a bed of red-hot coals, around which the darkies sat roasting peanuts and sweet potatoes, and having a good time.

It was after eleven o'clock when the party retraced their steps, and after laughing good-nights had been said, they all went to their separate abodes.

CHAPTER XIX

A MOONLIGHT SAIL

“So you have really made up your minds to leave us on Tuesday, young ladies?” said Mrs. Warner, as they sat at the breakfast-table, Sunday morning.

“Yes, we must leave you then, and I suppose you will be rejoiced,” answered Maud.

“On the contrary,” was the reply, “I wish you would remain longer. It will be dreadfully lonesome after you go, and I suppose you will leave us also?” she continued, looking at her nephew.

“I shall accompany the young ladies on their homeward journey to take care of them,” he replied.

“You mean, Mr. Armstrong, you will take

care of one, and let the rest of us paddle our own canoe," said Luella, laughingly.

"I shall repay you some day, miss, for that saucy speech," replied Beverly.

For answer, he got only a toss of her golden curls and a grimace of her bright face, as she and Ethel excused themselves and went out to the hammock.

"Oh, dear, Sunday is such a lonesome day here. If you want to attend church, you have to ride five miles in the raging hot sun; then you are so overheated when you reach there that you cannot listen to the sermon, much less digest it," said Ethel.

"Yes, it is the only long day, but even that passes quickly if you have the right kind of company; is that not so, Ethel? I know that you did not find last Sabbath dull, now did you?" asked Luella.

Ethel blushed as she acknowledged that she did not, for had she not the one with her then

that she loved dearest on earth? And in the glimmer of love's young dream any place would seem a paradise.

"See, Ethel, there are Fanny and Sadie Dunsart in their summer-house; let us go and have a chat with them. They look as lonesome as we feel." So the two girls started down the walk.

"Where are you going?" called out Maud.

"To kill time," answered her sister.

"Don't you think that we would find it more pleasant in the summer-house?" Robert Weatherstone remarked. "Come, Marion, let us take the lead." Marion arose, but the other two remained seated.

Luella and Ethel returned a few hours later, talking of a sailing party which was to be gotten up in their honor the next evening.

"Fanny Dunsart told us," began Luella, "that her brother is coming home to-morrow in a sail-boat. He has been spending his sum-

mer at Biloxi, Mississippi. She has invited us all to go sailing, one of these nights when we have a lovely moonlight."

"We shall be most delighted to accept the invitation," said Mr. Armstrong.

"Then please do not disgrace me by having too much of a love scene; for sailing by moonlight has a tendency to make people doubly sentimental, you know," answered Luella, laughing.

"Then look out for Warren Popenjay; he may again try to win the affections of a certain young lady," replied Armstrong. Everyone laughed and Luella was silenced for the time being.

Nothing was talked of but the prospective sailing party the rest of the evening, and the girls even dreamed about it. About ten o'clock next morning, a sail-boat was seen far out in the lake, and it was watched with interest until it reached its landing-place.

All the Dunsart family were there to welcome the idol of their household home, and they escorted him and his fellow-companions up the wharf to the house.

“There is great rejoicing in that home to-day,” said Robert Weatherstone, with a sigh, which was understood by Marion only.

“Yes; how gay they all were over his coming,” answered Luella.

The girls were busy packing for their journey homeward when they were interrupted by Fanny Dunsart, who had called. She was a pretty girl of eighteen, with large dark eyes, hair of glossy blackness and clear olive complexion. She had come over to press the invitation.

“And you will be sure to come, won’t you?” she asked.

“We shall be delighted,” answered Maud.
“At what time do we start?”

“Just after supper; we shall meet at our

summer-house, then go down on the wharf and wait for the moon to rise."

The sailing party consisted of sixteen ladies and gentlemen, and just as the glimmering moon arose above the horizon, they all got into the boat and sailed away. There was a light breeze blowing, just enough to swell the canvas and glide the boat along, and as the water parted at the bow, showing the phosphorescent gleaming, as if on fire, there was an exclamation of, "Oh, how beautiful!"

As the moon ascended gracefully, gliding through her path, hemmed in by innumerable stars whose light paled by her inconceivable brightness and whose reflection upon the water looked like greenish silver, it made a lovely picture. Never was there a more enjoyable party. All contributed according to each one's ability—Maud with her beautiful soprano voice, Marion with her soft alto, Mr. Armstrong joining in with a decidedly good tenor.

Young Mr. Dunsart had brought his guitar to help the entertainment, and even little Warren Popenjay sang his love-sick ditties with true animation.

They reached home at one o'clock in the morning, and all were profuse in their thanks for the pleasant time they had enjoyed.

CHAPTER XX

HOMeward BOUND

Mrs. WARNER turned with a sigh as she retraced her steps toward the house; for the last good-byes had been said, and the young people who for the last two months had enlivened her home had taken their departure, leaving her lonesome and sad.

As she seated herself on the gallery, her thoughts recurred to her married life; for the child that had died left her heart with an aching void which could never be filled.

“If my daughter had only lived,” she mused.

The young folks had a jolly trip home, and when they arrived at their destination they were met by those who were truly glad to welcome them back.

The Weatherstones' handsome carriage was awaiting them, and their father had come in it, being anxious to see them. After he had embraced both girls and commented on how well they were looking, Maud introduced her lover to him.

The old gentleman gave him a sharp, scrutinizing look; then, as if pleased with what he saw in the open countenance, held out his hand and grasped Mr. Armstrong's in a hearty English grip and welcomed him to his home.

Mrs. Weatherstone was standing on the wide piazza, waiting to welcome her girls home. How her mother's heart beat with pride as she saw her two beautiful daughters hastening to meet her. She folded each to her bosom with a loving embrace, then Mr. Armstrong was presented to her. After they had conversed for a while, Robert appeared and conducted Beverly to his room, while the girls retired to theirs to prepare for dinner.

"Well, it is good to be home once again," said Maud.

"Indeed, it is," answered her sister, "but I would have enjoyed it better if that horrid little Warren Popenjay had not worried me so."

"You cannot but acknowledge, Luella, that he was amusing for all that, for you might have had the blues if it had not been for his nonsense."

"I guess you are about right, Maud, for I had no real beau to say sweet nothings to me. By the way, I think that Papa is pleased with Beverly, for did you catch the expression on his face when you first introduced him?"

"Yes, I felt confident they both would admire him; for he is a man who would draw people toward him anywhere."

"He is a polished gentleman, Maud, and you are fortunate to have captivated him."

They reached the drawing-room just as the

gentlemen made their appearance, and the gong having sounded, they all entered the dining-room. It was a happy reunion, and the young folks entertained Mr. and Mrs. Weatherstone with their experiences on the lake shore.

CHAPTER XXI

THE DEATH

ROBERT WEATHERSTONE had been at home only a few days when he received a telegram from the doctor of the institute where his wife was confined, saying that she was seriously ill and for him to come on immediately.

He made such hasty preparations as were necessary, and telling his father that he was again called to New York, was about to leave when his mother stopped him, saying:

“Come to my boudoir a moment, Robert; I would like to speak to you, my son.”

He followed her there, and as they entered, she closed the door, then turning to him, said:

“Is the telegram in regard to her, Robert?”

“Yes, Mother, Una is very sick, perhaps dying, and that is my great hurry.”

“Well, my son, as terrible as death is, we could not wish to have her remain here on earth in perfect mental darkness, for we all believe that in the life beyond she will have her reason and be as one of the bright and shining angels in heaven. Oh, my son, how much better it will be for her!”

A stifled sob burst forth which shook the very depth of the strong man's frame, as he exclaimed:

“But, Mother, it is so hard! If we could question the justice of divine providence, we would ask why this dreadful calamity was sent to ruin the life of one so young and fair. Oh, Mother, you would have no conception of her loveliness. She is one of the fairest flowers ever planted in this great universe, and yet, like a flower, is left to pine away and die, hidden away from the sight of man, a life altogether lost to her fellow-beings.”

His mother gently laid her hand on her son's

head, as she answered: "You knew, my boy, before you clasped that beautiful flower to your breast that it was doomed. Yet your love was so great that you braved all and took it for your own, regardless of the consequences, and how relentless has been fate to thus pour down upon your head the fullest extent of her wrath for thus defying this warning."

As his mother was speaking, a look of resignation crossed his brow and illuminated his eyes, and he answered:

"I feel the justice of your remarks, Mother, and shall take my departure with a much more resigned spirit than I have ever before had. You have done me much good, little Mother."

"Thank God for that, my darling boy, and may He give you strength and fortitude to bear whatever trials are before you."

"May your prayer be answered, Mother,"

he said, as he tenderly embraced her. "Now I must go or I shall be late."

He reached the station just in time to catch the fast express which was to carry him to his destination. New York City at night is a grand sight, but Robert had no eyes for its beauty; his thoughts were with her who, he felt, was fast slipping from this mortal sphere.

Hailing a cab, he was driven as fast as horse could take him to where she was. As he alighted from the vehicle and rang the bell, a cold shudder passed through him. The doctor answered the summons.

"How is she?" asked Robert.

"There is no hope for her, sir," replied the doctor; "her constitution is not strong, so when the disease fastened itself on her, she could not cope with it."

Mr. Weatherstone, controlling himself by a desperate effort, asked to be conducted to

her. They entered the chamber of death together, but as Robert stepped to the bedside where his wife lay, and took her soft, white hand in his, the doctor retraced his steps and left the room. Looking down on the pale, beautiful face that lay so still, he whispered:

“Una!”

“Is that you, Robert?” came the soft answer from the lovely lips.

A cry of surprise escaped the husband’s lips, and he sank down on his knees beside her.

“Do you know me at last, my darling, my wife?”

“Yes, dearest, but only to be separated again until death unites us. It seems like a long dream, Robert, since we last sat by the water-side and watched the moon spread her silver rays on it.”

“Yes, my loved one; it has been a dream to you, but to me a stern reality.”

“Have I been sick long, Robert?”

“Very long, my Una.”

“I shall never recover, Robert, my husband, for I feel——” Here she sank back on her pillow and a death-like pallor spread over her face.

“Oh, my God! she is dead!” he cried.

The doctor hastened to the bedside and seeing that it was only a faint, gave her a stimulant which speedily revived her—she opened her great black eyes again, looked around as if in search of someone; when as they fell on her husband, a lovely smile illuminated her face and she whispered, softly:

“Do not leave me, dearest, for I feel that my end is near, and I want you by my side when it comes.”

“I will stay with you, my wife,” was all he could say.

“We were so happy, were we not, dearest?” she said.

“Unutterably so, my own precious wife,” replied Robert.

She seemed to think for a little space of time, then said:

“Robert, do you remember why my parents did not wish you to marry me?”

“Yes, my wife.”

“And their fears have come true, Robert, for I know now that I have been insane.”

“Oh, Una! don’t! don’t!” he broke out in agony.

“It was terribly hard for you, I know, my darling husband, for I remember it all now. Just after our baby was born all was darkness. Did it live, our little one?”

“No, Una, it died when it was two days old,” he answered, as he bent his head, and sobs shook his frame.

“It was just as well, Robert dear, for it might have shared the same fate as its mother. Will you miss me when I am gone, Robert?”

I have been nothing but a source of trouble and anxiety to you, and it will be well when I am gone;—Robert, I should have liked so much to have seen your mother.”

“Oh, my darling! my darling!” cried the heart-broken man. “If I only could have known this she would have accompanied me, for she knows of our union.”

“And she does not blame me, Robert, for ruining your life?”

“No, my Una, she had only the deepest sympathy for you.”

“But I have been only a sorrowful burden to you, my husband.”

“Our joy came first, my loved one.”

The paleness came into her face again, and her eyes closed as if in death, but after a moment she whispered:

“Come near me, Robert—take me in your arms and hold me tight, for I am slipping away from you—I feel the cold chills of death creep-

ing over me—I am content, my husband, to die—in your arms.”

She was still a while, then said: “Kiss me, Robert.”

He touched the beautiful lips, so tenderly, as if he was afraid that even a kiss, ever so light, would hasten the soul from its lovely body of clay. A heavenly smile lit up her face, making it radiantly beautiful, then a long-drawn sigh escaped her lips, and with it went the soul of Una Weatherstone.

Her husband’s agonizing cry brought the doctor to his side, who, when he saw that death had come, walked silently away.

Long he mourned by the side of his loved one. When he arose, the doctor, who had come in, put his hand on Robert’s shoulder, saying:

“She is asleep; your grief will not disturb her.”

This seemed to have some effect on Robert, for he arose and tottered to a chair. But

he would not leave her alone, and when the new day dawned he was still watching by his dead. Then the doctor, taking him gently by the hand, led him from the room. He made no resistance, but went like one in a dream.

“Mr. Weatherstone, have you made any arrangements regarding your wife’s funeral or burial?” the doctor asked.

“I wish to take her home. I would like to send a telegram.”

The doctor placed pen, ink, and paper before him and he wrote:

“Dear Mother: To-night I propose to bring, to be laid in the vault at Langly Hall, all that remains to me of my wife. You may tell them all.

“ROBERT.”

CHAPTER XXII

THE FUNERAL

THE family were seated in the drawing-room at Langly Hall, when the carrier brought in the mail bag. Mr. Weatherstone, on opening it, found a telegram addressed to his wife, which he handed to her.

“So it is as he expected,” she murmured, her eyes filling with tears, but she knew that she had a task before her that she could not shirk—that of telling the rest of the family Robert’s sad story—so she choked back her emotions and said:

“This is from Robert, and I have a very painful duty to perform. But before I tell you, I must beg of you all not to censure him for not relating it to you, for it would have done no good, only to cast a shadow upon your lives.”

Beverly Armstrong arose to leave the room, for he feared the presence of a stranger would be embarrassing, but Mrs. Weatherstone said:

“Please be seated, for are you not one of us now?” Then the mother told them the sad story of Robert’s marriage.

Many times her heart was wrung with anguish, and her gentle eyes filled with tears before she ended, but she persevered until the part came where she had to tell them of the sad end; then her nerves gave way, and handing the telegram to her husband, she silently left the room.

Both Maud and Luella were weeping bitterly, and the father had to wipe his eyes many times as he tried to read the telegram.

“Well, girls,” he said, as his voice faltered, “here is the end of Robert’s story. Death, the conqueror, has placed his cold hand upon the fair one, and claimed her for his own.”

“ Oh, is she dead, Papa? ” exclaimed both of the girls at once.

“ Yes, listen to this,” and he read the message Robert had sent. “ But is it not better so? ” he continued. “ Could we wish her back when the light of reason was denied her? No, she is far happier now, and time, the healer of all wounds, will dull Robert’s sorrow, and he will look back upon her memory with love and pity. And now, girls, you will have to put your feelings aside and get the house in readiness, for Robert will be here this evening.”

The girls arose and went silently around, doing as their father suggested. The servants were told so that the arrival of the corpse would not excite them, but there were many whispered conferences and awestruck voices among them. It was during this day that Mr. Armstrong proved himself the true man that he was, for if it had not been for his words of encouragement and friendly aid, the house-

hold would have been in confusion. Try as they would, their brother's grief would come to them and almost bereave them of their senses.

Once during the day Maud stole to her lover's side, and placing her little soft hand in his, said: "Beverly dear, I wonder what we would have done if you had not been here to help us?"

"My darling," he answered, as his handsome face beamed down upon her, "words cannot express how grateful I am to circumstances which have placed me here to be of service to you all, in this hour of bereavement, and I hope to stand by Robert and do what I can to lighten his terrible sorrow."

"Thank you, my beloved one," she answered. "Robert will sorely need sustaining in his agonizing trouble, I know. The house has already the appearance of death, Beverly," and she shuddered as she pressed closer to him.

“Yes, my darling, all is so quiet and—hark! yonder goes the carriage to bring back its silent occupant.”

“Then I must go to see where Mother and Luella are,” and she left her lover and went in search of them.

What a home-coming! Everything draped in crape, and white flowers instead of gay bunting roses of variegated hue. Here were hushed voices and silent tread in place of gay laughter and dancing steps, weeping instead of rejoicing.

Just as the clock proclaimed the hour of six, the carriage appeared, drawn by two milk-white horses, and stopped before the door. Robert alighted first, then his father. Between them they bore the casket that held but a form of clay, up the steps and placed it where it was intended to rest.

The bereaved husband then went to his mother and fondly embraced her, saying: “I

have brought what is left of my beautiful Una, and we will bury her where she belongs.”

“ You did right, my son; may heaven give you strength to bear the great trial,” replied his mother.

He kissed his sisters, and, shaking hands with Mr. Armstrong, said bitterly:

“ There is what is left of my wife; come, let us open the casket so you may all see what a vision of loveliness I have lost.”

The lid was lifted, and as they looked upon that marble brow and saw the sweet smile on those lovely lips, there was a universal exclamation of:

“ Oh, how superbly beautiful!”

Robert's unstrung nerves could not stand the strain any longer, and he fell back into Beverly Armstrong's arms, in a dead faint.

It was a blessed relief to Robert, for it lasted all night, and everyone was thankful that he was spared the agony. Early in the morning

a messenger was dispatched for the minister and a few friends, among whom were Marion, Ethel, and their parents.

By eleven o'clock Robert had sufficiently recovered to attend the service, and when all had assembled in the room where his wife's body lay, he walked in and took his position at the head of the bier, where he could look down at her for the last time.

His father had made the minister acquainted with the facts of the case, so now it was his duty to enlighten the friends who had gathered around.

After a few touching and heartfelt remarks, followed Bible passages; the prayer was said, then the friends walked silently past the casket to gaze upon her, and no one wondered at the husband's infatuation, for she was as superbly lovely as mortal could be.

They followed her to her last resting-place; then the friends returned to their homes.

CHAPTER XXIII

CONNUBIAL RITES

OUT of respect for her brother's recent bereavement, Maud had deferred her marriage until January. Although the New Year had set in dark, dismal, and disagreeable, this, her wedding morn, had dawned pleasant and sunshiny, which, she thought, was ominous of a happy and desirous future life.

Maud had risen early, for the excitement had driven away the balm of slumber from her eyes, so arraying herself in her morning robe, she wended her footsteps toward the garden.

The fresh morning air tinted her cheeks with a delicate rosy hue, and her blue eyes were as bright as twinkling stars. The gentle breeze

had toyed with the loosened masses of her lovely waving tresses. She formed a perfect picture as she walked back to the piazza where she saw her lover awaiting her.

A glad smile illuminated his handsome face as he sprang to meet her with outstretched arms, in which he caught her in an impassioned embrace.

“My precious darling,” he said. “I can scarcely realize that to-night will make you mine forever; it has seemed an interminable time to wait, and now that my happiness is so near at hand, I am completely overwhelmed at the idea.”

“Yes, dearest Beverly, it seems, too, that nature has joined with us, for the past week she has been weeping frozen tears, and to-day they have melted away in a flood of sunshine. May all the sorrows in our life end thus, is my most earnest wish.”

“I am glad, my darling girl, that you do

not wish for perpetual sunshine; but I hope that our future may be tempered just enough to make life interesting, and that the brightness after every shadow will increase our affection for each other.

“I know you will be queen of society in our dear old city,” he continued, “for they cannot fail to do homage to your talent and beauty.”

“Ah, Beverly dear, you see through the glimmer of love, but others are not apt to see me in this light; so do not be greatly disappointed should I not prove the success you prophesy for me.”

“Well, we shall judge, my sweetheart, by the impression which you make on some of my relatives who will arrive to-day.”

“That will be quite an ordeal.”

“You are equal to the occasion, my stately queen, for I know they cannot resist you,” he replied.

“Well, Beverly, after that compliment, I will try to do as you wish,” she replied laughingly.

“One more kiss before we go,” he said, looking askant at her, and she smiled lovingly as she gave the desired caress.

By four o'clock everything was in readiness, and when the carriage, which went to the station for the groom's relatives, arrived at the door, Mr. Armstrong was there to assist them to alight.

First came a tall, silver-haired, aristocratic-looking lady, whom Beverly welcomed as “Mother.” She was followed by his father, a decidedly stately old gentleman; then his sister, a lady of twenty-five, who was followed by her husband, a soldierly looking man, holding a little girl by the hand.

The Weatherstone family had collected on the piazza to give a hearty welcome to the newcomers, and during the introductions the



“In a moment Robert had her in his arms.”

little girl had been looking most earnestly at Robert Weatherstone.

“ Oh, Mamma! there is the sad man we met on the train.”

In a moment Robert had her in his arms and was kissing her most tenderly, to the amazement of everyone except the child's mother, who immediately recognized in him the stranger of the train episode.

There was a brief explanation, then the party entered the drawing-room.

“ Well, Mr. Weatherstone, I was not aware that you had any previous knowledge of any of my family.”

“ Nor did I, until now, but I assure you that it gives me pleasure to find that my little friend will be somewhat connected with me, for I know we shall be great chums after this.”

“ Well, this is a coincidence, and I am truly glad of it, too,” the mother said, “ for that valuable ring you gave Lorena has always been

a source of uneasiness to me. I did not like to accept it, you know."

Beverly's father and mother had been watching the beautiful girl who was so soon to be their daughter, and from their expression, they seemed very much pleased, for the former said:

"Well, Beverly, my boy, you have waited a long time to make a choice, but I think I am safe in saying you are a fortunate man."

Maud blushed at the compliment, as her lover looked at her.

"Yes, Father, you are right. All good things come to those who wait, and I consider that I have gotten the best," he said, as he slipped his arm around Maud's slender waist.

"Wait, young man, not so fast," answered his brother-in-law. "Perhaps there are other men who could say the same thing," and he looked lovingly at his own wife.

As night drew near the wintry wind blew crisp and cold, whistling through the branches of the trees, but it was not so disagreeable but what friends who had been invited to participate in the marriage feast could attend. The grand old house was a galaxy of light, and the conservatories had contributed all that was beautiful among the flowers in its possession, making the place a bower of loveliness.

Of all the beauties, there was none which could outshine the bride in her white satin dress and long veil of matchless material, as she slowly entered the parlor, gracefully leaning on her father's arm. Amid the soft strains of sweet music, the words were spoken which were forever to unite her to the man by her side. After the congratulations were spoken a grand feast was partaken of. The bride and her husband were not to leave for New Orleans until the following day, then Maud was to bid farewell to her old life and enter upon the new.

Next morning, Mr. and Mrs. Seewell and their little girl left for their Northern home, while Mr. Armstrong, his bride, mother, and father left for their home in New Orleans. When the latter party arrived at their destination and left the train, they were met by many of Mr. Armstrong's friends, who were waiting to give them a hearty welcome.

Their carriage was in waiting, drawn by two coal-black horses, which was to convey them home. Beverly pointed out places of interest along the way, then the carriage turned into St. Charles Street, where some of the most beautiful residences of the city are situated, and where her home was to be.

After a delightful ride, the carriage stopped before what was to Maud's notion, the most elegant mansion she had yet seen, and when they ascended the steps, Beverly said:

"Welcome home, my precious wife; I hope you will be pleased with life in our city."

“Thank you, my husband; I know I shall, having you by my side.”

He smiled fondly at her as they entered the spacious hall, then escorted her through the house.

When Mardi Gras season was near, Maud sent for Luella, and they enjoyed seeing the grand procession, equaled nowhere.

CHAPTER XXIV

ETHEL'S WEDDING DAY

THREE weeks after the preceding events, Ethel Easton opened her eyes on the last morning of her maidenhood, for that night, she was to become Mrs. Bertrand Roseland, and leave her far Southern home where her childhood and girlhood had been spent as the idol of her parents.

She was to leave all this for love of a man in whose honor and integrity she was willing to place her whole future; and she thought, as the first dawn of day entered and kissed her fair cheek:

“How sacred a thing is the marriage tie! How it binds the hearts together, so as to make the participants willing to brave any and everything for each other's sake. It makes a

woman leave her parents, home, and friends, and trust herself to the mercy of the man she marries."

Marion came over early in the day and superintended all the decorations and assisted Mrs. Easton in many ways. The marriage had been set for eight o'clock, and the guests began to arrive at seven.

The parlor was a bower of evergreen and flowers, and a large bell of forget-me-nots and daisies was hung for the young couple to stand under. Marion was not bridesmaid, but maid-of-honor, and very pretty she looked in her white lace over crimson satin, with only a red rose placed in her raven locks for an adornment, and she flitted here and there among the guests, having a pleasant word and a smile for each.

The clock struck eight; the minister took his place, and as the strains of the wedding march pealed forth, the young couple came

forward to be united in the holy bonds of matrimony.

Ethel was a vision of loveliness, in a robe of white satin embroidered with silver, and a handsome necklace of diamonds encircling her white throat. Bertrand, too, looked handsome and happy, as if he thought he had drawn the prize among girls.

CHAPTER XXV

AFTER TWO YEARS

WINTER and spring had passed, and the radiance of early summer filled the earth with joyous gladness. The birds had come forth warbling their sweet songs; all nature was fragrant with the odor of matchless flowers.

The whole woods was filled with melody; the air was tremulous with the whisperings of the perfume-laden breeze amid newly unfurled leaves on the great oaks outside the window, where Marion sat, this lovely evening, gazing out on the bluest of blue skies, as if to penetrate the veil which so shrouded her future from view.

“Mine is a lonely lot, indeed,” she mused. “I am pining my life away with vain regrets and bitter longings, while the other girls are

radiantly happy. Ethel and Maud are blessed in their husbands' love; Luella has met the man of her choice and will be married soon. But——" Her brow softened and a sparkling light came into her dark eyes, as a thought seemed to come to her.

"Amid it all, he stands bearing his sorrow as only the brave and noble can, and why should I complain? Is his lot not far harder to contend with? Yet he is patient, struggling manfully with the sad recollections of the past. I will mope no more, but shake off this despondency and try the fresh air for a tonic."

Putting on her hat and gloves, she started out for a walk. She had gone but a short distance, when who should she perceive coming in a buggy, and at a dangerously fast pace, but the object of her thoughts. Her heart beat against her breast like a poor captive bird longing to be free, but she composed herself, as the buggy stopped and the occupant

alighted by her side. It was Robert Weatherstone.

"Why, this is an agreeable surprise," he said, as he held out his hand, "but the pleasure is only forestalled, for my intention was to call upon you, it being such a delightful evening to take a drive. Will you come?"

"Certainly, I will," she answered, "but we must return to the house and acquaint Mother of the fact, or she might be worried."

"There you are again, little friend, always thoughtful of others," he answered.

"Well, it is my duty, Mr. Weatherstone, for surely she has the right to know."

"Yes, but I have noticed it in many cases where it was not your duty. You are always putting self aside to please others."

"You certainly have an exalted opinion of me," said Marion, laughingly.

"Marion," he began, after they had started for their drive, "can you guess why I have

asked you to drive with me this evening? It was from a selfish motive. I have a question to ask, and I could delay no longer, for I wished to know my fate."

"It must be something serious," she replied, "from the intonation of your voice, Mr. Weatherstone."

"Yes, so it is. So much so, that I dread to ask it lest I should be refused; then, Marion, what would be the consequences? My only hope, then, is that what I am about to ask will be granted, so that the future will hold some allurements, something to look forward to with pleasure and satisfaction."

Marion was all of a joyous flutter, for she felt what was coming.

"Well," she replied, "if what you have to ask, Mr. Weatherstone, I hold in my power to grant, you have simply to name it and I am sure that I shall do my utmost to promote your happiness."

“God bless you, my little one, for that generous speech. You, and you alone, can grant it, for it is yourself that I would ask for. You must have known that I loved you; I admired you before Una’s death, but my deep love for her has kept me true to her memory until now, and I know that, as the past dims, my love for you grows stronger. With you as my companion, the future will have a golden lining. Tell me, Marion, will you be my wife?”

In the stillness of the evening calm even the birds seemed to stop their glad refrain to listen for the reply.

“Yes, Robert, my one hope, my one longing has been for that question to pass your lips, that I might show you what woman’s love meant, for I have loved you since first we met. Now I am rewarded. Yes, I will marry you, only don’t think me unwomanly or forward in thus telling you, for my affections have been penned up so long that I have a right to

express them. It is beyond my power to resist."

"Darling, it is sweet to hear those words. I thought that you cared for me, but not with the vehemence that you now admit. Woman's power is great in controlling her feelings!" He paused for a moment, then continued:

"Do you know, dearest, that for months I have put off asking you this question that was tormenting me, with the thought that you would refuse me. Then I would ask myself why you had remained single so long, for I knew, dear, that suitors for your hand were not lacking. This thought gave me courage. Oh, Marion, we both realize what this evening is to us, and our union will certainly be blessed."

"Yes, I think so, for love like ours cannot be otherwise," she answered.

"Tell me, my dearest Marion, had I not loved you, would you have remained single?"

“Yes, Robert.” How it thrilled him to hear her utter his name. “My love for you is so strong that the thought of a union with anyone else was repulsive to me. I tried to argue myself out of this feeling, that is, when I began to think you did not care for me, but my love had centered itself upon you, and, try as I would, it would not be rooted up. I had resigned myself to circumstances, but only this evening I was bemoaning my fate, and got so morbid over the prospects that I wandered out for a walk to try to change my thoughts.”

“It must be true,” replied Robert, “that sometimes we mortals are tried to the utmost of our endurance, but if we remain steadfast, we are generally rewarded.”

“It looks that way in our case,” answered Marion, “for the prospects before us were gloomy enough, but now——”

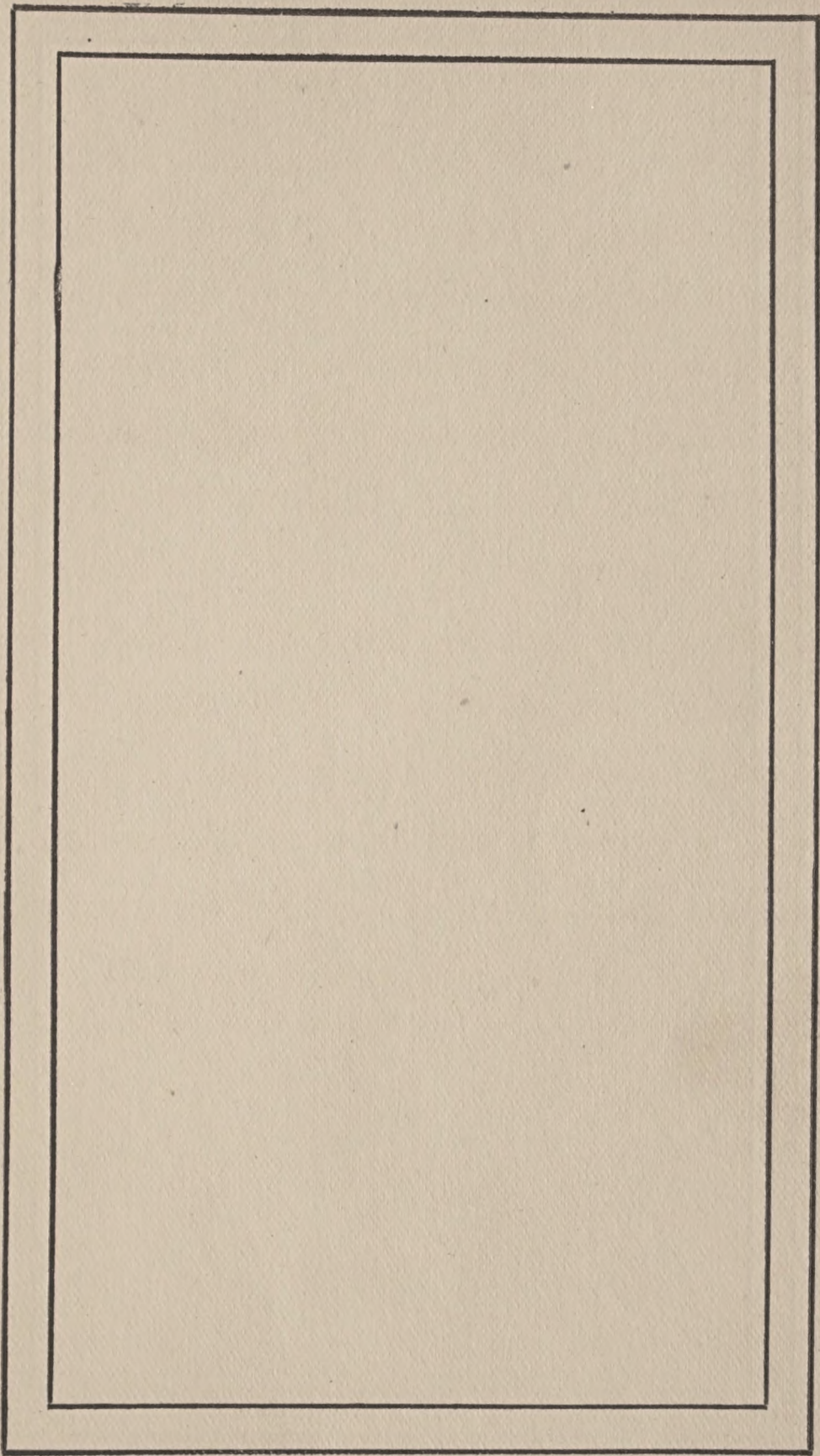
She raised her luminous dark eyes, shining

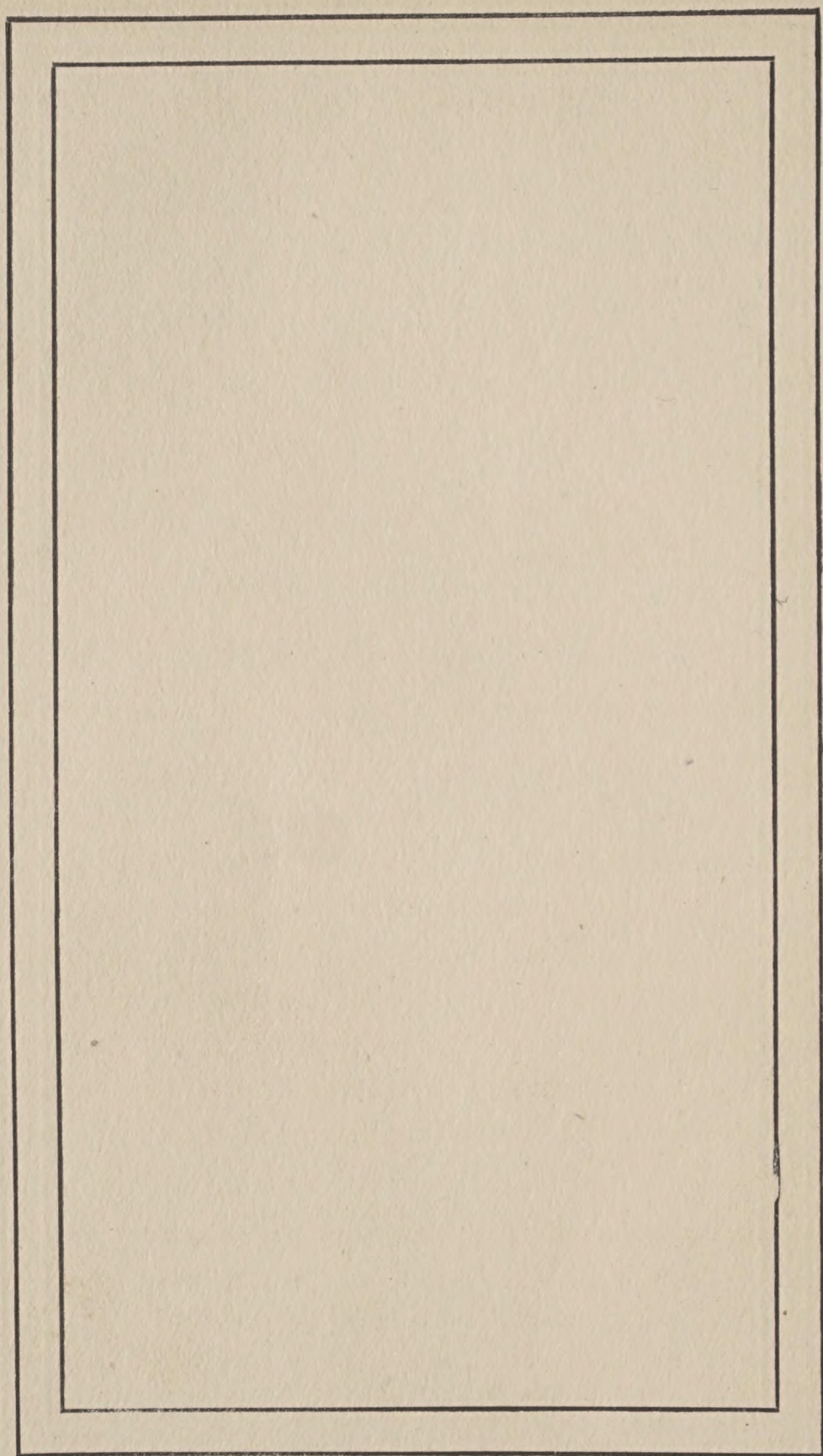
with love, to his. He could resist no longer, but letting the lines fall in his lap, he clasped her in his arms and showered her with kisses.

It was quite late before they returned home that night, but neither Mr. nor Mrs. Roseland had retired, and Mr. Weatherstone could not resist asking their consent for Marion. "I wish to feel that she is entirely mine," he said.

Both parents knew that their daughter would be well cared for, so they gave her their willing consent, and Robert Weatherstone returned to his home a far happier man than he had been for many a year.

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